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Public Parks in Urban Britain, 1870-1920: Creating a New Public Culture

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization in early Victorian Britain induced citizens to envision new kinds of public space in the city. Citing sanitary and moral motives, private associations developed popular support, pressed local governments and succeeded in creating numerous urban public parks by the late nineteenth century. New public parks in London, Birmingham and Bath stimulated a broad written discourse, nurtured civic pride and played an integral role in urban leisure. Yet government and open space society records, the press, guidebooks and novels show that these new public spaces also posed a fundamental dilemma. Should public parks foster the development of the ideal citizen, or should they accommodate all comers? Differences of class and gender stimulated conflicts ranging from the demarcation of public boundaries to exclude workers or verminous persons from parks, to disputes about respectability, temperance, religion, sports, sexual indecency and politics in park use. Subtle rituals of social display enabled parkgoers to define semi-private zones within the context of broad social interaction in public space. Other new developments in public life produced feelings of consensus among park users. Revitalized public ceremonies such as jubilees, coronations and park openings involved parkgoers as participants and built new traditions of community and citizenship. Comparisons of British and foreign parks bolstered national pride and made parks symbols of the nation, while botanical and zoological gardens advertised imperial variety and incorporated the British Empire into public culture. World War I forced public parks into a dual role, as exemplars of the war effort with soldiers, trenches and vegetable gardens, and as pastoral refuges from the war, focusing attention on parks' contribution to the nation. Throughout this period, parkgoers transformed not only parks but their own social and political relationships, constructing a broader definition of the urban public expressed through the language of citizenship. By 1920, public parks had transcended their initial conception as lungs for the urban body to act as icons of a more dynamic and democratic public culture in British cities.

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**PUBLIC PARKS IN URBAN BRITAIN, 1870-1920:
CREATING A NEW PUBLIC CULTURE**

Nan Hesse Dreher

**A DISSERTATION
in
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Supervisor of Dissertation



Graduate Group Chairperson

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1993

To George

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ABSTRACT

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CREATING A NEW PUBLIC CULTURE

NAN HESSE DREHER

LYNN HOLLEN LEES

Rapid urbanization in early Victorian Britain induced citizens to envision new kinds of public space in the city. Citing sanitary and moral motives, private associations developed popular support, pressed local governments and succeeded in creating numerous urban public parks by the late nineteenth century. New public parks in London, Birmingham and Bath stimulated a broad written discourse, nurtured civic pride and played an integral role in urban leisure. Yet government and open space society records, the press, guidebooks and novels show that these new public spaces also posed a fundamental dilemma. Should public parks foster the development of the ideal citizen, or should they accommodate all comers? Differences of class and gender stimulated conflicts ranging from the demarcation of public boundaries to exclude workers or verminous persons from parks, to disputes about respectability, temperance, religion, sports, sexual indecency and politics in park use. Subtle rituals of social display enabled parkgoers to define semi-private zones within the context of broad social

interaction in public space. Other new developments in public life produced feelings of consensus among park users. Revitalized public ceremonies such as jubilees, coronations and park openings involved parkgoers as participants and built new traditions of community and citizenship. Comparisons of British and foreign parks bolstered national pride and made parks symbols of the nation, while botanical and zoological gardens advertised imperial variety and incorporated the British Empire into public culture. World War I forced public parks into a dual role, as exemplars of the war effort with soldiers, trenches and vegetable gardens, and as pastoral refuges from the war, focusing attention on parks' contribution to the nation. Throughout this period, parkgoers transformed not only parks but their own social and political relationships, constructing a broader definition of the urban public expressed through the language of citizenship. By 1920, public parks had transcended their initial conception as lungs for the urban body to act as icons of a more dynamic and democratic public culture in British cities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Visions of fresh air and sunlight exerted a powerful influence on residents of the rapidly expanding and industrializing cities of early Victorian Britain, contrasting sharply with the smoke and noise of belching factories and the crowded, filthy slums around them. In an age of self-help and social activism, particularly among the middle classes, urban citizens acted vigorously to make this image of restorative nature a reality within their cities. As private individuals, as members of reform societies, and as officials in local and national government, Victorian Britons helped ensure that public parks became an integral part of city geography and city life by the end of the nineteenth century.

Public parks offered potential solutions to numerous urban crises by the 1840s. Fresh air might prevent cholera epidemics and compensate for primitive sanitary systems. Open spaces could alleviate overcrowding of inadequate housing, and provide room for exercise to build stronger bodies. New leisure activities in parks might tempt workers away from pubs, while as citizens of all classes gathered to enjoy their new public spaces, the very publicity of their leisure could hold all to higher moral standards. Flowers, green grass and trees could provide aesthetic relief from

the drab filthiness of the city, and the introduction of new parks might even stimulate economic development around them.

All these motives inspired members of what came to be called the "open space movement" in the second half of the nineteenth century. Park supporters lobbied wealthy individuals to donate land, organized neighborhood subscription campaigns and pressed government bodies to purchase new parks. Their cause elicited broad support from the press and from members of the public. Public parks opened in nearly every British city by 1870, stimulating a wide written discourse and bolstering civic pride. At the same time, legislation like the Bank Holiday Act in 1871 created more leisure time in which urban residents could use parks.

These new public parks had important, if unintended, consequences for the evolution of urban culture during this period. The designation of "public parks" implied the existence of a "public" to use them, but the concepts of public rights, public opinion and public authority all held inherent contradictions. Must the "public" necessarily include all residents of any given city? Or might it exclude the immoral, the infected, or the unemployed? Who, if anyone, had the authority to control behavior in public space, and how could disagreements about park use be resolved? During the period between 1870 and the end of

World War I, public parks forced citizens to face these issues and to hammer out their disagreements. Differences of class, politics, religion and gender among parkgoers produced vigorous debates as well as conflicts within parks. Both the symbolic meaning of parks and their practical uses for leisure activities became focal points of discussion in a revitalized and dynamic public sphere.

At the same time, other activities in new public parks contributed to the emergence of stronger feelings of commonality in the city. Large-scale public ceremonies held in parks, park institutions representing nation and empire, and the events of World War I all produced new links typically expressed through the language of citizenship. On the civic as well as national and imperial levels, Britons formed a new kind of public community in which citizenship counterbalanced more fragmented identities. By the early twentieth century, public parks served as physical representations and symbols of this more democratic public culture.

How exactly was a public park defined? The term "park" came originally from country houses, where it distinguished ornamental gardens and lawns from agricultural fields and woods, but in the city a park meant a large, enclosed, landscaped space open to the public. Public parks differed from other urban open spaces. Unlike streets, they were primarily devoted to leisure. Unlike the commercial pleas-

ure gardens popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they offered free public access, though without the same variety of amusements. Nor were they in the same position as private property which landowners might open to visitors on an informal basis. Public parks meant publicly-owned land, dedicated to free public recreation. London's royal parks, which gradually opened to broader public access during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries under the Office of Woods and Works, provided the models for new public parks. A smaller park might also be called a public garden, a recreation ground or a playground. Larger commons and heaths usually retained these names, or became "open spaces." In this study, I will use the specific terms when appropriate, and the term "park" generally to refer to all types.

This dissertation explores public park use in three British cities in the period from 1870 to 1920: London, the capital of government, the home of royalty, and the "Metropolis;" Birmingham, a growing industrial city with a reputation for civic spirit and municipal reform; and Bath, historically a fashionable aristocratic resort but then beginning to decline. Public parks are investigated in their own right, but also as a way to approach a more fundamental issue, the development of a new civic and national culture, in an innovative way. Though park creators may

have been disappointed by the failure of parks to eradicate disease or drinking habits, public park use unquestionably changed social and political relationships within British cities. By 1920, parks anchored a broadened and reconstructed public culture.

Sources

I have been fortunate to find abundant and little-used primary material. Government records from the Office of Works (hereafter OW), Home Office, War Office, Metropolitan Board of Works (hereafter MBW), London County Council (hereafter LCC), Birmingham City Council and Bath City Council (including minutes, legislation, police records and letters from the public) have first been consulted. Records of private societies promoting the creation of public parks or lobbying for particular park uses, such as sports, political and religious meetings, schools, and botanical and zoological gardens, have also proved useful. General public discourse has been approached through a study of national and local newspapers and journals, as well as contemporary books including park histories, travel guidebooks, etiquette guidebooks and novels. This broad range of material has proved invaluable as a way to obtain a full perspective on the issues of public culture and public space.

Past Park Appraisals

Though British public park use fits into various categories of historical analysis, including architectural and landscape history, urban history, leisure history, political history and cultural studies, it has not yet been systematically addressed. Divers past appraisals thus combine to produce the background to this study.

Park Creation. Most existing work on British public parks comes from architectural and landscape historians. George Chadwick examines the design of parks in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including theories of landscape design and campaigns for individual parks. His primary concern, however, is to evaluate the "useful and aesthetic values of the Victorian park," of which he generally approves.¹ Though Chadwick never specifically discusses park use, he makes a telling comment: "We have got used to thinking of the public space as something apart from the town and its life: we must bring it back and interweave with it the other threads of living, working, moving."² The relationship of parks and cities, therefore, must be addressed through a study of park use as well as park creation.

Hazel Conway's recent study of Victorian municipal parks, the only full-length work on that subject, also concentrates on development and design. Drawing on American

work (see below), Conway sums up park creation as "one manifestation of the rise of modern institutions to control the physical and social processes of urbanisation," but her book accords primary importance to visual design.³ She devotes ample space to landscaping theories and plans, but her anecdotal style prevents her from developing a satisfying theory of park creation. She initially points to "a background of severe social unrest and an increasingly polarising class system between workers and employers," making park creation "part of the political process."⁴ At another point, she sees physical health as the primary motive, later including "social and moral health;" at still another she cites "social conscience, philanthropy, skilful entrepreneurship, politics and municipal enterprise" as key factors.⁵ Conway does present a useful review of relevant legislation, showing that only after the Public Health Act of 1875 could local authorities easily proceed with municipal park creation, but she does not make the relationship between parks and the city a central issue.

Other works offer different motives for park creation, again without an overall synthesis. Sheila Metcalf's thesis based on local newspapers understandably stresses "the part played by the local press in promoting and reporting [parks]," but also notes "the linking of parks with sanitary reform."⁶ Susan Lasdun attributes park creation to "the

threat of social unrest. It was hoped that the municipal park would help alleviate the chaos generated by rapid industrialization and a rising population," though unrest seems to have been of minor importance after 1850.⁷

Two historians of Birmingham briefly examine mid-nineteenth century park creation in that city. Douglas Reid argues that the early open space movement in Birmingham stemmed from three motives: "health, social morality, and the needs of children," plus "apprehension for the future of society and humanitarianism."⁸ By the 1860s, he thinks, a new motive of "civic honour in the national polity" had emerged as fears about public health and rioting faded.⁹ While also identifying health and moral reform as motives in Birmingham, Bill Bramwell points to a deeper "realisation among the middle class that they had some responsibility for, or self-interest in, the health and welfare of the working class. It was also a response to working-class demands for recognition and reform."¹⁰

More synthetic work on park creation comes from American historians, and though American parks differed from British ones in certain ways, there are useful parallels. Galen Cranz sees parks as "part of the rise of modern institutions -- the successive attempts to gain control over the social and physical consequences of urbanization."¹¹ She views early "pleasure grounds" as "transcendentalist"

and anti-urban, but identifies the immediate motive for park creation as economic: "a better working environment and ... a legitimate benefit to business" for real estate and tourism.¹² Public health, mental health, and "good citizenship" were secondary factors. But after 1900, Cranz argues, new parks emphasized "social progress," revealing "an increasingly positive and optimistic view of cities."¹³ A similar development in the perception of urban parks, I argue, took place somewhat earlier in Britain.

Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar chronicle the history of New York's Central Park. They cite a combination of motives for its creation: "the city's commercial and physical health; social and moral arguments that it would 'improve' the disorderly classes' and foster order among them; and cultural contentions that it would display the cultivation of the leading citizens."¹⁴ Yet like Cranz, they give economics primacy: "The decision to build the park, although clothed in democratic rhetoric, was fundamentally rooted in the interests of New York's wealthiest citizens."¹⁵ They also see a transition in the relationship of the park and the city in the early 1900s, as Central Park gradually "encompassed most of the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of the city itself."¹⁶ Thus, both American histories stress how public parks became integral and positive elements of the city and its culture

by the twentieth century, an important point neglected by most historians of British parks.

Several British historians discuss park creation in the context of social reform by focusing upon private park organizations. David Owen's study of English philanthropy offers a brief and mostly positive appraisal of the open space movement as part of a nineteenth-century trend in philanthropy away from "simple humanitarian concern with human misery and misfortune" to "prevention, conservation, and rehabilitation."¹⁷ Owen sees such newer reform groups as successes. Even as the state became more involved in park creation, he argues, "Public policy often followed along lines previously laid down by voluntary organizations, and public agencies often depended on them to carry it out."¹⁸

Thus, he argues that the open space movement involved "constructive cooperation, financial and otherwise, between private philanthropists and public authorities."¹⁹

H.L. Malchow outlines the park movement in more detail, emphasizing private benevolence in the 1840s, preservation of open land in the 1850s and 60s, and rescue of small inner-city spaces in the 1870s.²⁰ Malchow underlines aesthetic motivations for the creation of parks, arguing that the "pastoral ideal" was "central to much of the social reform sensibility of the nineteenth century," but he also cites "cholera, industrial ugliness and Chartism" in

addition to moral concerns.²¹ He identifies the formation of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (hereafter MPGA) in 1882 as a turning point in the open space movement. With previous park activists "a disparate, loosely associated group of clergymen, spinsters, upper-class philanthropists, and a few radicals," the MPGA presented "a more ambitious, assertive, and effective organization."²² Less enthusiastic than Owen overall, however, Malchow concludes that by the 1890s the parks movement demonstrated "strong ambiguity," espousing "radicalism aimed at subjecting landed property to public control" in combination with "implied discipline and authoritarianism;" it "raised money and carried out its work like any other Victorian charity, but with the un-Victorian intention of doing so only until the government could be persuaded to take over its role."²³

Historians of municipal government have explored official park creation, in a counterpart to work on private groups. Owen's history of the MBW views its park acquisitions in London as "of permanent value" despite "some just criticisms" of its financing policy, which involved paying lords of manors of commons and designating building lots in other parks.²⁴ Within the MBW, Owen argues, decisions on parks were often obstructed by "local jealousies, especially the hostility of suburban vestries toward improvements in Central London."²⁵ Owen also sees the MBW's refusal to act

quickly in the matter of public meetings in its parks as detrimental. Gibbon and Bell's history of the LCC also comes to an ambivalent conclusion about the MBW's record on parks: "not nearly enough, but ... at least it was a far better state of affairs than when the Board began its work," while local vestries and district boards during this period rate "only lukewarm praise."²⁶ Malchow, on the other hand, defends the MBW, since "in the absence of a unified administrative and tax system, wide-scale urban planning was nearly impossible to organize and pay for without national help."²⁷

The LCC replaced the MBW in 1889, and Gibbon and Bell give it an essentially positive rating on open spaces. So does Chris Waters, noting its park creations were "praised by friend and foe of the Council alike," though he stresses the LCC's dependence on the MBW's work and on "the successes of voluntary organizations" including the Kyrle Society and the MPGA.²⁸ Significantly, Waters also sees open space as an issue which crossed party boundaries, so that "Moderates and Progressives could work together on the Parks Committee, believing that open spaces would improve public health."²⁹ The politically-divided members of the Council were united, on this subject, by "a concern with public order and discipline, with the efficient management of people and

spaces, and also with the encouragement of responsible citizenship."³⁰

Historians of the Birmingham City Council highlight progressive reforms including its provision of open spaces. Reid discusses the advent of "many large-scale businessmen" to the council "from the late 1860s onward with the intention of contributing to education, and, thereafter, to municipal reform," including "a new energetic policy of park provision."³¹ Bill Bramwell agrees with Reid's analysis of park creation in Birmingham in one respect: "By the 1870s the provision of parks by the Town Council was supported by many of Birmingham's middle class as part of a 'civic gospel' of municipal activity."³² But he also stresses the "fundamentally class-based nature of the use of public space," and argues: "Many among the middle class regarded public parks as positive inducements to the working class to withdraw from leisure pursuits that they considered eroded their sense of responsibility towards authority, the family and the demands of work."³³ Bramwell concludes that these reform efforts failed because it was "questionable whether the abstract and diffuse notion of a common 'civic community' could profoundly affect the outlook of most working people."³⁴ These various works consider different aspects of the process of park creation, yet these analyses are rarely integrated into a comprehensive theory. For the more

fundamental topic of this dissertation, park use, a comparable situation exists.

Park Use. The most relevant historiography for park use is that dealing with the history of leisure. Peter Bailey's study of mid-nineteenth century Bolton, Lancashire focuses upon class conflict in leisure activities. Bailey argues that middle-class campaigns for rational recreation represented an attempt to re-establish control over the working classes, but that "rational recreation failed to achieve regular occasions of social community."³⁵ Middle-class reluctance to serve as role models and working-class resistance to middle-class ideology were both obstacles, and the two groups remained deeply divided. Bailey concludes: "Leisure was now less to be explained than exploited," but his version of the social control model seems overly polarized, as when he discusses early class-based restrictions on park admission without addressing their removal.

Martin Daunton treats park use in similar terms in his study of working-class housing, arguing that in the mid-nineteenth century public space "lost its ambiguous, semi-private character."³⁶ Thus, he sees parks as "moral enclaves in the town, with their regulations, iron railings, controlled entrances, and park wardens to enforce order ... people could assemble, but in a passive rather than participatory role, and always under the control of a definite

regulatory agency."³⁷ Yet park regulations were very frequently the result of agitation on the part of the members of the public themselves. Ongoing uncertainty about the meanings of public space provided the key controversy.

Conway devotes one chapter to park use and leisure activities, mentioning public meetings, sports, concerts and ceremonies. She considers the expansion of sports facilities a significant, though limited, opportunity for women and children, and views public meetings as continuing a tradition of "working people's rallies."³⁸ Like Bailey, however, Conway concludes by endorsing a simplistic theory of social control: "Parks 'solved the problem' of working-class recreation through the sports that could be played (but not on Sundays), the types of meetings allowed, the choice of refreshments and the almost total ban on alcohol," by maintaining middle-class control of their use.³⁹ Conway's overall analysis of park use is thus somewhat unsatisfying, ignoring differences of time and place, depending too heavily upon secondary sources, and exaggerating the role of class tensions. A closer analysis of park use shows the development of a new culture in which class consciousness mingled with a new idea of public culture based not on commercial exploitation and class division but on consensus.

From another perspective, H.E. Meller explores leisure in the city of Bristol from 1870 to 1914. While she discus-

ses class as a factor, Meller looks more benignly on the middle classes than Bailey, Dauntton or Conway. Rather than repression, she sees a middle-class attempt to create cultural unity in the urban community, "trying to raise the level of civilization as a way of solving the 'social question'."⁴⁰ Local landowners were urged to provide amenities such as public parks, "part of the basic social equipment of urban life," as "the practical, cultural dimension" of the ideology of "social citizenship."⁴¹

This policy was somewhat successful in practical terms, but Meller argues that late in the nineteenth century it became clear that urban cultural unity could not be achieved. Reformers and city officials turned away from social citizenship to focus on town planning and new garden cities, with a new conception of the city as "merely a reservoir of people, each with rights and needs to be met, rather than the city as a single community;" this meant "a self-conscious fragmentation of cultural influences along class lines."⁴² Her model offers a coherent logic, but the relationship between public authorities, private groups and parkgoers in park policy was more complex; it helped produce a new kind of urban culture through the common use of just such facilities as public parks.

Meller also questions the effectiveness of reform efforts. "There is no doubt that an attempt was made by

middle-class reformers to define a code of values for society at large which was termed Respectable," she writes, but "newer activities such as a wider pursuit of music, organized sport and commercial entertainment gained the status of Respectability, with little reference to middle-class ideology."⁴³ F.M.L. Thompson's work on respectability in Victorian Britain similarly argues that though efforts to provide "specialized space in the shape of public parks" formed "part of the drive to civilize the masses," in the end "general motives of philanthropy, civic pride and urban improvement were more responsible than efforts narrowly aimed at undermining the hold of the public house."⁴⁴ He agrees that public park campaigners were "consciously seeking to shape the tastes and habits of the working classes" but sees organized sports as a more important influence, one which the working classes seized from reformers.⁴⁵ Reid likewise argues that rational recreation in Birmingham reflected both an artisanal tradition and middle-class efforts at moral reform. He notes that while the parks were at least somewhat successful at providing alternatives to drinking, their effects on morality cannot be substantiated since respectability emerged in other areas of public life as well.

My analysis of public park use fits more closely with the latter group of historians, though neither group has

paid primary attention to public park use. While efforts at cultural reform clearly occurred, and while parkgoers clashed in numerous ways, class divisions appear to have declined rather than increased in importance in leisure activities in the late nineteenth century. Other historians have explored more specific aspects of park use, such as political meetings, social display, ceremonies, nationalism and World War I; their work is reviewed in the appropriate chapters.

General Theory. In a broader context, outside the field of history, public park use fits into a current debate about the functions of public space and of the public sphere as a whole. Sociologists such as Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett both address this issue, offering analytical frameworks in which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see the disappearance of meaningful public culture. Habermas traces the evolution of the "bourgeois public sphere" from its positive, active role in the rational critique of state and private society in Europe in the eighteenth century to its complete loss of agency by the twentieth.⁴⁶ He identifies the press as the catalyst for what he terms a failure of the public sphere:

the mediated public is called upon more frequently and in incomparably more diverse ways for the purposes of public acclamation; at the same time it is so remote from the processes of the exercise and equilibration of power that their rational justification can scarcely be demanded, let

alone be accomplished any longer, by the principle of publicity.⁴⁷

Rather than an effective public sphere, Habermas postulates the development of a "pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption" in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸ His rather deterministic model does not always fit the British case for the nineteenth century, but his idea of a mediating public sphere provides a useful theoretical construct. Public parks, I argue, proved a crucial ingredient in the evolution of the public sphere in late nineteenth-century Britain. Application of Habermas' framework to the problem of public space, in fact, results in a much more positive assessment of nineteenth-century public opinion and public culture. Government departments and newspapers appear as useful extensions of a continued vital public culture, rather than solely as parts of an antagonistic propaganda machine.

Where Habermas assigns a major role in the formation of public culture to written discourse, Richard Sennett targets more physical aspects such as dress and street behavior, arguing that "the fall of the ancien regime and the formation of a new capitalist, secular, urban culture" resulted in "an unbalanced personal life and empty public life" by the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Like Habermas, then, Sennett portrays the destruction of meaningful public life during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but instead of the

press he blames the way in which urban dwellers began to play roles in public: "this spectator did not participate in public life so much as he steeled himself to observe it."⁵⁰ Yet Sennett also claims that people "need specific places in public whose sole purpose is to bring them together," and credits eighteenth-century parks and promenades in London and Paris with the diffusion of elite habits to the lower classes; he further argues that "a war or other catastrophe" can help to form a communal identity."⁵¹

In fact, combining evidence about public park use in Britain with the theoretical constructs developed by Habermas and Sennett produces a different sort of conclusion about the public sphere. Park use allowed members of the public to exercise continuing agency and to participate in public life in a positive and constructive way, despite the advent of the popular press and mass culture. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will outline the progress of public parks from mid-nineteenth century arenas for reform to icons of a more dynamic and democratic public culture in British cities by the early twentieth century.

Synopsis

Chapter 2 describes the shocks and crises of Victorian urbanization and traces the varied motivations for the opening of new public parks. The formation of the most impor-

tant private groups in the open space movement, their methods and their results then follow. Next, the concurrent creation of municipal parks and municipal park authorities and their relationships with private groups are explored. Finally, three case studies of new parks illustrate how park creation required a combination of public and private efforts.

The next two chapters explore the cultural consequences of new public parks, which sparked conflict and physical controversy, addressed in Chapter 3. Citizens newly aware of their ownership of public parks faced a fundamental dilemma: should parks cater to the ideal citizen, or accommodate all forms of public behavior? Defining public boundaries provided the first issue. Once inside the park, parkgoers clashed over whether, and how, to encourage more "rational" or civilized behavior, citing activities such as religious practices, sports or sexual indecency. Other parkgoers struggled to acquire the right of political assembly in parks. Ultimately, park authorities and parkgoers compromised on a broad definition of the public and park behavior.

At the same time, Chapter 4 demonstrates how public parks occupied increasing space in written discourse and in everyday life in the city. Both matter-of-fact guidebooks and novels established park use as routine for urban

citizens, and helped codify the social and cultural functions of parks. Parks acted as restorative natural (and semi-private) escapes for tormented individuals, lovers and families. More important, parks brought different social classes together, and this public exposure helped to define social status in a period of class fluidity. Fashionable society used parks to construct semi-private zones within public life, while liminal groups such as women and workers stretched the boundaries of park activities and social identities. At the same time, parks became urban tourist attractions, drawing new spectators who played crucial roles as viewers and arbiters of social displays.

The next three chapters describe developments in public life which led to greater consensus in park use. Chapter 5 explores the significance of revitalized public rituals held in city parks, including large ceremonies such as jubilees, coronations, and peace celebrations, and smaller local events such as park openings. These newly democratic communal activities, held in public spaces, built feelings of community and citizenship. Ceremonies focused and formalized park use, and involved members of the public not only as spectators but as crucial participants in the ceremonial process. Through them, children, women and workers claimed a greater role in public life.

Following on the results of consensual ceremonies, Chapter 6 examines the increase in national and imperial ideology used in connection with public parks. Frequent comparisons of British and Continental parks bolstered national pride and ensured that parks became representative icons of British culture. More tangible park features, including flags, statues and "Shakespeare gardens," served as visual reminders of the links between the public and the nation. Botanical and zoological gardens in parks advertised imperial variety and associated parks with scientific progress and imperial prestige. In response, citizens redefined public culture around national and imperial identities.

Finally, Chapter 7 looks at a period of particular strain for public parks. Parks faced new challenges and played a dual role during World War I. Military use of parks moved onto a vast new scale, with soldiers drilling, military installations and trenches and vegetable gardens. Parks led to conflict between patriotic citizens supporting military activities in parks as part of the war effort, appropriate to their role as symbols of the nation, and those who looked to the parks as refuges from the war. After the war, citizens struggled to reconcile prewar and postwar park uses as newly prestigious groups like women and organized labor worked for a greater park presence. At the

same time, new war memorials made parts repositories of common war memories and national victory.

In conclusion, public parks added a new ingredient to the unstable mixture of urban culture in the late nineteenth century. Park use produced new conflicts between citizens with different class, gender, political and religious identities. But as parks transcended reformers' initial visions of helping the diseased, the dissolute and the disadvantaged, they laid the foundation for a more democratic conception of public citizenship in the twentieth century. Members of the public redefined and enlarged their sphere of influence, revitalizing urban society and urban politics while constructing more positive attitudes about cities and the British nation.

1. George F. Chadwick, The Park and the Town: Public Landscape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London: Architectural Press, 1966), p.313.

2. G. Chadwick, Park, p.374.

3. Hazel Conway, People's Parks: The Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p.222.

4. Conway, People's Parks, p.35.

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CHAPTER 2: THE OPEN SPACE MOVEMENT AND PARK CREATION

Introduction

Industrialization and urban migration in the early nineteenth century drastically altered living conditions in British cities in ways most citizens found unattractive and even dangerous. These changes united urban residents of diverse backgrounds, and inspired them to organize for urban reform. Their efforts to redesign their cities for a new age produced a new demand for public recreational space. This chapter will explore the varied motives which led Britons to desire new public parks in their cities, including concerns for improving public health, moral standards, urban aesthetics and economic development. Of these, public health provided the key stimulus, especially for government action. Motives of moral reform, aesthetics and economics were important to smaller constituencies, and while they certainly played a role, they would not have resulted in park creation without the sanitary dangers of the early Victorian period.

Building on these motives, the formation of private groups in the open space movement helped to create new public spaces. The successes and failures of the most important park societies, including the Commons Preservation Society (hereafter CPS), Kyrle Society and MPGA, will be reviewed. Next, the development of municipal parks and park

authorities in London, Bath and Birmingham will be investigated. Private and public efforts together succeeded in opening a large number of public parks by the end of the nineteenth century. A turning point in park creation came around 1890, when both park activists and city governments began to promote new types of parks and park uses. Again, this stemmed primarily from concern for public health, now directed at improving physical fitness rather than averting epidemics.

Finally, one case study for each city illustrates the complex reality of park creation. A variety of motives and both private groups and public authorities (with a significant overlap in personnel) played important roles in opening new parks and making them an integral part of city life. Individual urban cultures also influenced the course of park creation. As American historians have demonstrated, the close relationship of the public park and the city offers the best framework for interpretation of park creation. British public parks, originally a cure for urban ills, quickly became the foundation for a new urban culture. New public parks provided both space and incentives for the transformation of public culture between 1870 and 1920.

Motives for Park Creation

Rapid urban growth in the early nineteenth century presented citizens with novel crises. Inadequate housing

and infrastructure, and limited transportation, caused overcrowding as well as disease, stunted growth, and (contemporaries thought) drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution. In the absence of strong local government, especially in London, groups of private citizens worked to ameliorate these conditions, confident of their abilities to improve city life. One frequently discussed solution was the creation of public parks. Activist Sir Robert Hunter noted, typically: "The rapid growth of the population of large towns, and especially of London, forced upon the attention of the nation the necessity of preserving lands in their vicinity for purposes of health and recreation."¹ While public health, moral standards, aesthetic concerns and economic factors all served as motives for park creation, reformers and government officials cited combinations of these factors to explain their support for public parks.

Public Health. Overcrowded housing and primitive (or non-existent) sanitary systems produced filth, disease and death in growing cities. Unprecedented cholera epidemics struck England in 1831-2, 1848-9, 1853-4 and 1866-7, killing tens of thousands of all classes with shocking suddenness, while typhus and typhoid struck citizens down at a steadier pace.² The poor suffered most, but even wealthy citizens risked contagious disease in close-packed cities. The first national report on birth and death statistics in 1839 by William Farr clearly demonstrated the city's unhealthiness

compared to the country, followed by Edwin Chadwick's seminal 1842 Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain; both increased awareness of the crisis in public health. Anthony Wohl argues that this "alarming return to the age of epidemics" meant "the town was regarded by many as the inevitable nexus of disease and premature death."³

This situation certainly produced widespread concern. As Wohl notes: "the most widely held of Victorian social doctrines was that physical well-being and a pure environment were the essential foundations for all other areas of social progress."⁴ Sanitary problems were seen by many citizens as the primary obstacle to harmonious city life, and numerous reform groups addressed urban health problems in the 1840s and early 1850s. These included the Metropolitan Improvement Society, concerned with "checking the fearful mortality of the over-crowded and ill-drained neighbourhoods of the poor;" the National Philanthropical Association "for the Promotion of Social and Sanatory Improvements, Street Cleanliness, and the Employment of the Poor," and the National Health Society, "to unite and organize voluntary efforts for the collection and diffusion of well-established sanitary knowledge, which bears on the physical and moral welfare of all classes of society."⁵ Many of these organizations attracted doctors and "public men" as members, but the movement also included the Metropo-

litan Working Classes' Association for Improving the Public Health and the Ladies' Sanitary Association, which drew from a broader pool.

While emphasizing the severity of urban problems, public health reformers confidently offered remedies, and pressed city governments to implement them. Farr noted in 1840: "There is reason to believe that the aggregation of mankind in towns is not inevitably disastrous."⁶ Similarly, the Health of Towns Association proclaimed in 1846 that "towns are very unhealthy," but stressed: "the principal causes of that unhealthiness are known; and ... it is within our power very considerably to diminish them."⁷ In 1855, the MBW was formed to construct sewers in London, putting urban health on an official basis. Public health problems were not limited to London, of course, but its size made them particularly urgent there.

With no knowledge of germs, Victorian medical theory up to the 1880s held that "diseases arose spontaneously from the miasma, or effluvia, or noxious gases emanated by accumulated organic matter."⁸ In this view, public parks could solve the urban health crisis, with their fresh air and sunlight an antidote to disease. The Select Committee on Public Walks of 1833 produced the "first general survey of the open space available for public use in the major industrial and commercial centres of England," and recommended the creation of new urban promenades.⁹ Farr's 1839 report

also concluded that, together with a sewer system: "a park in the East end of London, would probably diminish the annual deaths by several thousands."¹⁰ And the CPS secretary wrote in 1867: "The Open Spaces in and around London ... are its salt and its preservatives from forms of disease at once mysterious and terrible."¹¹

To public health reformers, parks functioned as the "lungs" of the city, stressing the organic unity of the town and its citizens. The theory had some medical shortcomings, but fresh air and light could only improve dank areas. (On the other hand, Wohl points out that parks did not preclude polluted air; sheep grazing in Regent's Park in the early 1840s were often blackened by smoke.)¹² The ability to provide parks was among the new powers given to local authorities by the Public Health Act of 1848, showing a new understanding of the obligations of city government. A gardener commented in 1851: "it is only by the occurrence of modern epidemics, producing that attention to sanitary matters which forms such a prominent part of the present age, that the necessity for good public parks has been duly recognised."¹³ Similar thoughts emerged in Birmingham in 1857:

The high state of mortality in Birmingham has long been the source of much anxiety to all social reformers. ... a few years since a meeting of the burgesses authorized the Town Council to take the necessary steps for obtaining power to purchase ground for parks for the people.¹⁴

In response to this perceived obligation, many municipalities opened new public parks all over Britain. The MBW's park superintendent commented in 1869, when London's first two municipal parks opened: "within the next forty years, London will contain six millions of inhabitants; and it therefore becomes the duty of the present generation, to provide, as far as possible, before the existing opportunities are lost, for the health and recreation of its successors."¹⁵ Provincial officials felt the same. At the opening of Birmingham's first municipal park in 1876, the mayor noted "the necessity for such open spaces -- the importance of having those lungs for great cities, breathing-places for their teeming and industrious population."¹⁶ In Bath, finally, a city councillor observed at the opening of Henrietta Park in 1897: "The more breathing space a town can secure the healthier it must be, and this is all important in a city like ours, the resort of visitors and invalids."¹⁷

The introduction of sewers and other sanitary reforms in the 1850s and 1860s improved mortality rates, but did not end concern for public health. Those who escaped cholera and typhoid might still suffer stunted growth and poor overall health. Wohl notes: "a new 'type' of Englishman had emerged, one who did not necessarily succumb to the epidemic diseases which had ravaged England earlier in the nineteenth century, but who, nevertheless, could hardly be considered

healthy," and as a result, attention shifted "from sewers and drains to living conditions and standards of living."¹⁸ Thus, Lord Brabazon begged in 1881: "surely something might be done ... for the children of our city populations, to strengthen their growing frames, and thus give them some chance of contending with success against the hurtful influences which surround them."¹⁹

This new concern turned the park movement away from large airy spaces to smaller, more active recreation grounds in the 1880s and 1890s. Metcalf argues: "the need for provision of light and air as a sanitary reform was overtaken by the growing popularity of organised sports," and Malchow notes "a shift in emphasis from ornamental parks to recreation facilities" as the MPGA's priorities "shifted from the provision of 'outdoor sitting rooms' to strenuous physical exercise."²⁰ The National Physical Recreation Society was formed in the 1880s, and the London Playing Fields Committee in 1889, the latter "to encourage and keep alive ... the peculiarly English sports of cricket and football," and both focused upon adding sports facilities to public parks.²¹ Again, reform efforts influenced local governments to create new recreation grounds to improve public health.

Moral Reform. Disease was not the only motive for park creation, however. Many nineteenth-century reformers perceived a link between physical and moral disorders. As

Andrew Lees writes: "The conditions of city life seemed to many observers to threaten much more than the physical health of men's bodies. They also weakened the bonds that made for healthy and stable communities of values and interests, from the family and the locality to the level of the nation."²² Moral reformers did not dispute sanitary problems, but believed the urban crisis went deeper than mortality rates, "to the root of the social tree -- to the deepest foundations of the political fabric."²³ One park lobbyist even thought: "Physical mortality is a small matter compared with the morality and manhood of a country."²⁴

Like physical health, declining morals inspired the formation of private groups to tackle specific issues like temperance or, like the Association for the Improvement of Public Morals, "low and corrupting sources of pleasure" in general.²⁵ Drinking was a major target for open space activists. Octavia Hill blamed drinking on the lack of open spaces in 1876:

thousands of families who have no place to sit in but one close room, in which the whole family has eaten, slept, washed, cooked. ... the children swarm in the narrow court; the dust flies everywhere, the heat, the thirst is insufferable, the noise deafening, the crowd bewildering; they go to the public-house; do you wonder?²⁶

Mayor Joseph Chamberlain agreed in Birmingham: "It was simple nonsense to wonder at the intemperate habits of some portion of their population, if they do not provide them some better opportunities for innocent enjoyment."²⁷

Opening parks to fight drinking also elicited substantial working-class support. Hill's sister Miranda commented on workers in 1887 after a meeting to consider a new park: "the Temperance view of the question excited more enthusiasm than any other, except the good the park would do to the children."²⁸

The chance to rescue children before they developed bad habits inspired many reformers frustrated by intractable adults. One described a slum in 1867 where "children might be seen getting rid of the good influence of the school" and recommended playgrounds "where the moral missionary could continue the school training," and "introduce the civilising power of public opinion to the inhabitants of lanes and alleys."²⁹ A recreation ground opened in Birmingham in 1877 motivated this tribute to its donor: "In providing a breathing space and healthy recreation to the children confined too long in the narrow courts of Birmingham, you do much to make their lives morally and socially purer than they are at present."³⁰

Larger social goals also inspired park creation. An analyst of Birmingham disparaged working-class recreation in the absence of parks as "of a nature neither conducive to health nor to morality -- of a nature neither to improve the character of the artisan, nor to increase our reputation as a town."³¹ The Temple Gardens caretaker thought in 1858: "if more public and private playgrounds of this description

were opened to the poorer class it would do unlimited good towards improving their minds and their domestic habits."³² And Hill hoped to reunite disparate parts of society with the uplifting power of public parks: "You never will, or can, really separate yourselves from your neighbours; accept then the nobler aim of making them such that you shall desire not separation -- but union."³³

City officials were not immune to this language. An MBW member felt in 1856: "Great things were expected from them, not only in regard to the sanitary but the social position of the metropolis ... crime and misery were fostered by the want of proper means of recreation among the people."³⁴ And Waters writes of the LCC: "Although the rhetoric of improved public health often accompanied Progressive parks policy, that policy also grew from the belief that healthy, outdoor amusements might reduce the influence of the street and the public house in the recreational life of the London worker."³⁵ Thus moral reform played a subsidiary but still important role in catalyzing park creation.

Aesthetics and the Pastoral Ideal. Aesthetic proponents of parks stressed the desirable contrast they presented to the city as "rus in urbe." Nature was thought to have an ennobling effect on urban dwellers, as Albert Fein writes of one early park agitator: "Place and others of his generation had a deep religious belief in the power of Nature to reform

-- and the park was Nature transported to the city."³⁶ Malchow agrees: "idealization of the countryside clearly played a large role in determining the way literate and socially conscious Britons viewed the central social transformation of their century, the growth of towns."³⁷ John Ranlett's study of the early environmental movement argues that the founding of the CPS in 1865 marked "a turning point in the public perception of society's relationship to nature," and a stimulus to urban land preservation.³⁸

Contemporary evidence bears out these arguments. A doctor argued in 1877:

We have only to observe the crowds that flock to the parks, the veneration with which the people seek what is beautiful and elegant in Nature, and how much they esteem the small patches of gardens and parks which philanthropic persons have given them. It is an overwhelming proof of the immense influence of natural beauties on the lives and habits of the people.³⁹

Another reformer several years later described the consequences of not having such urban parks:

many townspeople are quite ignorant of the commonest objects of nature ... those who have this kind of ignorance cannot take pleasure in wholesome kinds of recreation ... many of them are sure to become the victims of those pauperising kinds, drinking and gambling.⁴⁰

Such sentiments thus inspired the creation of new urban parks. At the opening of Birmingham's Cannon Hill Park in 1873, the Daily Post commented: "there are few now who, if they think so, have the courage to avow that there is no need for beauty in the lives of men who work for daily

bread."⁴¹ Joseph Chamberlain stressed the need "to keep alive in the hearts and minds of the people some sense of beauty" with "the provision of trees with green foliage, of shrubs and of beautiful flowers."⁴² Another Birmingham citizen asked the City Council in 1903 to convert an unsightly "motor track" also used as a rubbish tip into a park, as "a substantial improvement at a very small expense in a neglected district."⁴³

Private societies played an important role in publicizing aesthetic issues. Hill's Kyrle Society was founded on the principle of extending beauty to the masses. She saw public parks as a way to achieve this goal, commenting: "Londoners are surrounded with the most depressing ugliness ... If we could alter this, it would go far to refine and civilise them."⁴⁴ The National Trust, formed in 1895, explicitly cited beauty, while the Selborne Society sought to preserve wildlife as well as "To protect places and objects of interest or natural beauty from ill-treatment or destruction."⁴⁵

Some aesthetic park arguments revealed an underlying hostility to urban living conditions as such. One journalist wrote simply in 1887: "The growth of large towns is admittedly one of the great evils of our time."⁴⁶ In this view, parks could only be seen as desperate measures, as remedies for symptoms rather than cures. Martin Gaskell argues that parks "could only be partial answers to the

problems -- palliatives in a worsening environment."⁴⁷ Yet the pastoral ideal also contained some positive perceptions of cities. Lees argues: "Many of the Victorian men and women who wrote about the various deficiencies of the towns they inhabited did so precisely because they fervently believed that these places could indeed be made more livable."⁴⁸

Parks certainly offered a visual contrast to built-up areas of cities, but their intensive use and rapid incorporation into city life made them sometimes dubious representations of nature. Malchow points out that "the rural ideal" actually "created certain obstacles to constructive urban planning," and Conway notes that while "the municipal park represented an ideal landscape, it was at the same time a real landscape set in an urban environment and used by real people in various ways."⁴⁹ Aesthetic motivations, therefore, tended to become less important as park creators moved into the actual stages of park creation.

Economic Incentives. Finally, economic arguments were made both for and against the development of public parks. Opening a park often raised the value of residential land surrounding it. The creators of Bath's Royal Victoria Park anticipated that "the property adjacent to the Commons would, by the contemplated improvements, be considerably enhanced in value."⁵⁰ American historians have seen this motive as paramount there. Yet economic factors could be,

and often were, used as a reason not to create parks. Malchow argues, with obvious logic: "The great expense of purchasing, creating, and maintaining parks in areas already built up ... and the intangibility of their benefit, discouraged local authorities in many towns."⁵¹ Solutions required difficult compromises. In the mid-nineteenth century, both the OW and the MBW tried to finance new parks in London by designating part of the park land for building. Development of desirable residences was then intended to offset the cost of creating the parks. However, public opposition to these schemes meant that building plans eventually had to be dropped in all three cases, and the "building" land returned to the park.

In Bath, more than in London or Birmingham, park creation was tied to economic considerations specifically tailored to the improvement of the city's tourist trade. An advertisement for the city's first park in 1830 promised local visitors "an increased degree of accommodation and pleasure, by rendering accessible to their enjoyment the free use of Shady Walks, Ornamental Plantations, and agreeable Drives," but stressed: "such an accommodation for our residents and visitors was much needed as an attraction to our elegant city, and as an inducement for a longer sojourn here in the months of summer."⁵² Overall, however, as Conway concludes: "the formation of parks was not directly related to the economic climate, either locally or national-

ly," and except in Bath, economics appears to have played a smaller role in park creation in Britain than in America.⁵³

The Growth of Park Societies

Urbanization produced numerous reasons for citizens to desire public parks, yet only after mid-century did the concept of public parks develop enough resonance to stimulate large-scale park creation. National government departments took little action, and of a grant of £10,000 voted by the House of Commons for "public walks" in the nation in 1840, only £500 had been expended four years later, while the government had refused ten other petitions for the money.⁵⁴ By the 1860s, however, large numbers of mostly middle- and upper-class citizens banded together to compensate for the lack of government action on public parks.

Initial action in the creation of new parks thus frequently came from private societies, ranging from small local groups to large national organizations. While maintaining discrete agendas, park societies often worked together in coalitions, and their work had a significant impact. Asa Briggs argues that the creation of municipal public parks in Birmingham "could not have been assured had it not been for the willing co-operation of private individuals and of voluntary bodies," and most contemporary newspapers and journals offered similarly positive coverage

of these groups.⁵⁵ Conway agrees: "The successful development of small parks and recreation grounds was largely due to the efforts of reforming organisations and to the movement to convert disused burial grounds and churchyards into open spaces for recreation."⁵⁶

Several of the larger groups are discussed here in detail: the CPS, which focused on protecting legal rights to commons; the Kyrle, which targeted aesthetic improvement; and the MPGA, which opened smaller spaces in the inner city; as well as their Birmingham counterparts. In addition to these park societies in London and Birmingham, many smaller ones also existed. In 1870 the People's Garden Company issued a prospectus "with the object of securing for its shareholders and members land to be laid out as gardens and recreation grounds."⁵⁷ This group managed to purchase part of Old Oak Common, but then dropped out of the public record. Most smaller groups dealt primarily with park use rather than park creation, however.

Commons Preservation Society. A common was an open area, once part of a feudal manor, with a complex ownership structure including a "lord of the manor" and "commoners" with various rights of use. This medieval tenure system had endured for centuries despite occasional clashes between landlords and commoners. But in the mid-nineteenth century, commons near growing cities became potential suburbs. Many lords applied for Parliamentary "inclosure," which extin-

guished public rights of access to the land. Some lords wanted to turn parts of their commons into public parks, selling the rest; others objected to the commons' frequent role as "dumping grounds for refuse, reservoirs of gravel, and haunts for tramps and gypsies," while still others sought the greatest financial reward through building.⁵⁸

One such case proved particularly significant to the open space movement. In 1864, Earl Spencer announced his intention to enclose Wimbledon Common south of London, reserving three quarters of it for a park but selling the rest. A public outcry arose and the House of Commons convened a Select Committee to investigate the matter. This committee agreed on "the supreme necessity of preserving all [Commons] that still remained open, for the health and recreation of the people and for the training of volunteer corps."⁵⁹ It ruled that the commoners had sufficient legal rights to resist the lord's intention, so that the whole common could be preserved as public space.

Two of the Select Committee's members were George John Shaw Lefevre (later Lord Eversley), a radical Liberal M.P., and P.H. Lawrence, a solicitor, both of whom lived in the area.⁶⁰ With several other M.P.s, they founded the CPS in 1865 "to preserve these [Metropolitan] Commons for the use of the public, and to place them intact and unaltered in character under proper management."⁶¹ This was not the first group to be concerned with enclosures; a North London

Anti-Enclosure Society had been active as early as 1851. But the CPS, with its influential social and political connections, and its "membership roll of greater than average wealth," became the first important open space organization.⁶²

The CPS "aroused local opposition, formed local committees, raised funds to fight law suits or found public spirited men of substance who would themselves shoulder the lion's share of the cost of these legal battles."⁶³ It lobbied in Parliament and helped pass the Metropolitan Commons Act in 1866. This required proposed enclosures to be evaluated by Parliament, which rejected virtually all subsequent nineteenth-century cases, giving the commons to municipal authorities for administration. The CPS's emphasis on legal methods and close ties with government helped it succeed. Shaw Lefevre boasted in 1886: "the House of Commons has been very largely the scene of our operations ... we have been very successful there."⁶⁴ Many of the founding members were M.P.s, and Shaw Lefevre twice served as First Commissioner of the OW. The group also attracted many types of citizens as members: "Quakers were to be found among these reformers and people who were not confined to any one political party," with "a number of ladies."⁶⁵ District branches were established in nine London suburbs by 1867, and later national affiliations were developed.

The CPS was quick to publicize its successes. An 1876 report concluded: "The Society has become known as a centre of communication, a body able to secure in Parliament a hearing for its views, and a depository of information on the question."⁶⁶ Four years later, it reported that its goals "if not fully attained as yet have been greatly advanced during the last 15 years, and the altered state of public opinion with respect to them has been mainly due to the continued exertions of the Society."⁶⁷ Public opinion was accompanied by material success: "Since the Society was founded, no Common within 15 miles of London has been successfully inclosed."⁶⁸

The CPS thus achieved both practical and ideological goals. In 1886, Shaw Lefevre reflected on

the very great change of public opinion on the subject of commons since our Society has been founded. ... When our Society was formed, 21 years ago, there were many who looked upon us as rather a radical body. ... revolutionary characters, bent on some agrarian attack on the rights of property. ... It is now seen that the objects of our Society are conservative in its truest and best sense.⁶⁹

The CPS solicitor, Sir Robert Hunter, commented in 1895: "Thirty years ago inclosure was considered to be a national duty; and the idea of preserving a common as a means of enjoyment had hardly been conceived. ... the efforts of the Legislature are now directed to the protection, and not to the destruction, of commons."⁷⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, the CPS had preserved most of the large

commons near London, and turned its attention to rural open areas and public footpaths. In 1899 it merged with the National Footpaths Society.

Kyrle Society. Octavia Hill, once a schoolteacher, became a prolific writer and open space activist later in life. After failing in a campaign to save London's Swiss Cottage Fields from builders, she joined the CPS in 1875, and served on its general and executive committees. But their goals diverged, and Hill and her sister Miranda founded the Kyrle Society in 1876 "with the aim of placing objects of beauty within reach of the poor."⁷¹ Hill's most recent biographer, Gillian Darley, comments that this "romantic ideal of the countryside -- a rural idyll in contrast with the distressing urban scene -- was a consistent theme throughout Octavia's life and work."⁷² Like many upper-class women active in reform movements, Hill's goals combined hard work with an emphasis on improving home life, especially for women and children who spent most of their time at home: "Our lives in London are over-crowded, over-excited, over-strained. This is true of all classes; we all want quiet; we all want beauty for the refreshment of our souls."⁷³

While the Kyrle's objects included housing projects, art and music, open spaces always comprised an important part of its work, with a separate committee for this purpose after 1879. As Hill commented in 1877: "There are two great

wants in the life of the poor of our large towns ... the want of space, and the want of beauty."⁷⁴ She felt personally inspired by this work. After supervising poor children in a new playground, she wrote: "No one can imagine the awfulness of the dirt and disgustingness of the children. ... Yet when I see their joy ... it seems to me a thing for which I shall rejoice all my life."⁷⁵ Hill solicited donations of parks from wealthy landowners and portrayed the gift of open spaces as a less demeaning form of charity than others, one more likely to provoke a positive reaction in the recipient: "if a memory of you as a donor comes to him as youth ripens into manhood ... the thought is more likely to incite him to make some great, abidingly useful gift to his town, than in any way to paralyse his energies or weaken his self-respect."⁷⁶

Hill identified small neighborhood spaces, such as disused burial grounds, as ideal for conversion into what she referred to as "out-door sitting-rooms." There, she thought, "much good might be done, and the evil of playing in the streets prevented."⁷⁷ During 1884, for example, the society laid out three disused burial grounds to be handed over to local vestries. Like the CPS, the Kyrle expanded nationally. A branch was established in Birmingham around 1880, but there focused more on entertainment and clubs than on open spaces.

While the Kyrle Society did have some successes in opening new public gardens, Darley concludes that overall:

The weakness of the Kyrle Society was its lack of structure as an organization trying to set out on a mission of civic reform. It was not sophisticated enough for the task in hand, its membership was neither politically aware nor activist. But the Kyrle Society's aims were entirely recognizable as those underlying the Garden City and later New Town developments, which were framed in terms suitable to more sophisticated times.⁷⁸

Malchow likewise argues: "it never succeeded in attracting a very politically aware or activist membership. ... largely a clubbish group of the well intentioned."⁷⁹ Hill's own interests turned away from cities, and she later helped to found the National Trust.

Metropolitan Public Gardens Association. An offshoot of the National Health Society, the MPGA focused upon small, inner-city spaces and helped redefine the open space movement to focus on physical fitness rather than prevention of disease in the 1880s and 1890s. Its chairman was Lord Reginald Brabazon (later Earl of Meath), a prolific writer whose articles underlined the link between urban life, physical fitness and national prestige. His wife was also interested in open spaces, having joined the Kyrle Society around 1880 and sponsored the conversion of a churchyard into a public garden.⁸⁰ In 1882, Brabazon held a meeting of the National Health Society and Kyrle Society's open space committees to discuss a possible merger; when Hill

declined, he started the MPGA (initially the Metropolitan Public Garden, Boulevard and Playground Association).

The group's official objects were "to provide breathing and resting-places for the old, and playgrounds for the young, in the midst of densely-populated localities. ... for two chief reasons: first, in the particular interest of the poor; second, in the general interest of the community at large."⁸¹ This focus came from the realization that the many new large parks on the outskirts of cities did not answer all urban needs for public space. As Brabazon pointed out in an 1881 article:

Ask the police constable how far off is the nearest public park or open space where the children now rolling in the neighbouring gutter might enjoy their games free from the dirt and contamination of the present scene of their sports. ... he would stare in astonishment at the remark, and would answer that such a paradise is not within reach of such as these.⁸²

Probably due to his social and political connections, the MPGA quickly attracted many titled aristocrats to its membership list, which reached about 350 by 1887.

Malchow summarizes the MPGA's methods as "pressure for legal changes, efforts to defend existing open space, and direct action in the creation of new parks and playgrounds."⁸³ The group lobbied for passage of legislation such as the 1884 Disused Burial Grounds Act, which facilitated the taking over of public spaces by local authorities. In 1888, it reported:

perhaps the most interesting and permanently useful of the undertakings of the Association are those efforts which are made to procure the carrying out of existing Acts relating to open spaces, to oppose proposed action by which open spaces would suffer, and to force the Government, the Vestries and the District Boards, the Charity Commissioners and other bodies, to do their duty in this direction.⁸⁴

The group appealed to financial economy in soliciting donations, describing the cost of a playground: "The annual cost of maintenance is about £100," or "about the sum which it takes to give 1,000 to 1,500 children one day's holiday in the country."⁸⁵ Though its emphasis was mainly on fitness, it also played on fears of disease to gain contributions, portraying playgrounds as

not a mere question of ornamental philanthropy ... also a vital question of social economy and expediency.

London is year by year becoming more and more packed, and populated, and extended, to a degree that must fill every reflective mind with concern and apprehension.⁸⁶

The MPGA sometimes struggled for funding, and had difficulty achieving a quick turnover of the spaces it laid out for management by local government. In 1887, its annual report warned members:

You have lost no opportunity of endeavouring to transfer the maintenance of these open spaces, as soon as possible after their completion, to the Local Authorities; but ... there remain on your hands at this moment, as a heavy burden on your funds, no less than thirteen gardens and six playgrounds.⁸⁷

Special circumstances, such as the Lord Mayor's fund for relief of the unemployed in 1887, provided large one-time

payments to the group. And once Meath became chairman of the LCC's park committee in 1889, he quickly arranged for it to acquire a dozen or so of the MPGA's spaces.

The MPGA's projects included laying out new playgrounds and old burial grounds. In addition to landscaping, the group provided trained "caretakers" to supervise and organize children's play. In 1885, a disused jail at Horse-monger Lane became a playground which "daily resounds to the noise of running feet, and to the joyful cries and laughter of thousands of merry boys and girls."⁸⁸ An 1892 report boasted: "its results are becoming so well known that the advice of the Secretary upon open space matters is sought for from all parts of the United Kingdom and from foreign countries."⁸⁹ Three years later the group proclaimed: "the increasing interest taken in matters connected with open spaces both in London and the provinces is due, in great measure, to its efforts during the twelve years of its existence."⁹⁰ In forty years, the MPGA laid out 120 parks, gardens and playgrounds in London.⁹¹

Birmingham Park Societies. Large provincial cities also spawned park societies, which in Birmingham fell into two categories. The Birmingham Association for the Preservation of Open Spaces and Public Footpaths, founded around 1883, followed the example of the CPS. Initially, the group limited itself to "distributing information as to the actual state of the law" and "urging on Local Authorities the

importance of protecting the interests of the public in these matters."⁹² By 1886, it was conferring with the CPS, MPGA, Kyrle and other societies, and focusing upon the actual acquisition of land. In 1887, the group unofficially sponsored a campaign which raised money to purchase part of an area known as the Lickey Hills, then handed over to the Birmingham Town Council and dedicated as public land in 1889.⁹³ Additional land was added the following year.

Other Birmingham groups more closely resembled the Kyrle and MPGA. The Birmingham Playgrounds, Open Spaces and Playing Fields Society (with several name variations) was formed in 1906 "for the purpose of discovering any opportunity that might befall of preserving an open space, and of stimulating the liberality both of landowners and private citizens and of the Council itself."⁹⁴ It focused on the provision of small inner-city recreation grounds, and obtained donations of several plots of land to present to the city.⁹⁵ The group viewed the provision of playgrounds as a key "municipal function. Children must have playgrounds if they are to become decent citizens."⁹⁶ In subsequent years, with the support of local vestries, the group raised at least partial funding for several more recreation grounds, some of which the city park committee was forced to purchase against its will. Another group, the Birmingham Housing Reform and Open Spaces Committee, convinced the Birmingham City Council in 1909 to allow it to

install playground equipment, which had been forbidden until then, and in 1909 opened the Castle Bromwich Playing Fields (later taken over by the city).⁹⁷

By the early twentieth century, park activists had achieved enough success to move in new directions, and new types of societies formed. The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty was founded in 1895 by Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and others, and focused on the countryside rather than on cities. In contrast, the Garden City movement sponsored entirely new cities designed with ample open space. The London Society sponsored a redevelopment plan in 1918 featuring more open spaces to form a green belt around the city.⁹⁸ One architect commented in 1921:

It is of prime importance that the community should, without unnecessary delay, secure a communal centre in the form of a really good civic park to each of the twenty-eight or more boroughs ... and control a continuous open zone right round London, besides having ample playing fields for growing youths within easy reach of all the important residential districts, and a generous provision of supervised gardens (open-air play centres) for the little children as near as possible to their dwellings.⁹⁹

With this, he argued, "the town dweller of the future will be a contented citizen, more in harmony with his environment: healthy and fit, an asset of the utmost value in a well-ordered community."¹⁰⁰ Concerns about sanitary problems and moral disorders were no longer paramount, nor was the role of the park as an aesthetic counterpart to the

city. Public parks had become an essential part of city geography and urban citizenship.

Municipal Park Creation

Private groups played such an important role in early park creation partly because, as Conway notes, municipal park purchasing was hampered until mid-century by the absence of enabling legislation.¹⁰¹ This included not only authority for local governing bodies to buy or accept parks and to maintain them, but also work reforms such as the Ten Hour Act of 1847, Saturday half-holidays, and the Bank Holiday Act of 1871 which gave Britons the leisure time necessary to use parks. Municipal government was also fairly rudimentary in many cities at this point. The national government moved slowly in creating new parks, and only after lengthy public campaigns. Outside London, the chances of state park creation were virtually nil, as Metcalf argues: "the Government of day, usually in the guise of the Office of Woods and Forests, was to appear infrequently, and usually to disappoint any hopes placed in it."¹⁰² Yet the later nineteenth century saw the concomitant advent of municipal park authorities and municipal parks in London, Bath and Birmingham.

London. London had a particularly complex situation for public parks, since no central municipal authority existed before the MBW in 1855, and no formal central

government until 1889 when the LCC replaced the MBW. Thus London's first public parks were the royal parks administered by the OW. The OW, which had split off from the Office of Woods in 1851, governed the royal parks nominally in conjunction with a royally-appointed Ranger, but this position had become almost purely ceremonial by the late nineteenth century. Instead, the First Commissioner, a political appointment, made decisions carried out by the Secretary, Bailiff and other permanent civil service officials.

Several new royal parks opened in London in the nineteenth century, including Regent's Park (the first public portion opened in 1838), Primrose Hill (1842), Victoria Park (1845) and Battersea Park (1856). The last two, along with Kennington Park (formerly Kennington Common, renamed 1852) and Bethnal Green Museum Gardens (opened 1875) were transferred to municipal control in 1887, to be funded from local rates rather than national revenues. Victoria Park had opened in London's East End in 1845 after several years of lobbying by residents in the area. After a series of public meetings, a formal petition was submitted to Queen Victoria in 1840 requesting a park to help alleviate "the prolific sources of poverty, crime, disease, and death," and legislation and funding were provided in 1842.¹⁰³ The Victoria Park Preservation Society, a residents' group, was in-

strumental in adding land designated for building to the park in 1872.

But despite the opening of some new royal parks, the importance of new municipal authorities in park creation in London is clear. It was not until the MBW was formed to construct sewers in 1855, with power to acquire parks conferred in 1856, that real progress began. One member described his understanding of the MBW's duties in 1856: "It now devolved upon that board to supply the want [of parks]; and they would be doing credit to themselves and largely contribute to the health and comfort of the metropolis if they gave encouragement to such works."¹⁰⁴ An MBW committee accordingly reported in 1857: "it is desirable for the better sanitary condition of the Metropolis, and for facilitating the means of healthy recreation for the public, that Parks should be established in certain parts of the Metropolis, hitherto neglected in that respect."¹⁰⁵

London's first municipal parks were created in response to petitions by citizens. Residents of the Finsbury area, for example, initially requested the OW to create a new park for them in 1841, but the lack of affordable land and subsequent changes in government created recurring obstacles. Their pleas were repeated in 1856 at a borough meeting, in which citizens resolved "That a Park on the Borders of a District, so large as the Borough of Finsbury, and containing a dense industrial Population of nearly half a million,

is universally admitted to be a public necessity," and now petitioned the MBW as the new local park authority.¹⁰⁶ The MBW had noted earlier that month that "there had been an immense agitation among the people on the subject of places being appropriated for public recreation," and was receptive.¹⁰⁷ In 1857 Parliament passed an act allowing the MBW to acquire land for a Finsbury Park, and the OW promised to contribute £50,000. Though this promise was later retracted, arrangements for two new municipal parks were announced in 1866, the MBW formed a park committee to manage them, and Finsbury and Southwark Parks opened in 1869.

Finsbury Park was funded primarily by metropolitan rates (local property taxes), but the MBW also planned to build on part of the land, a controversial idea that had originated with Victoria Park. Even before the park opened, however, protests were received demanding that the "building land" be incorporated into the park.¹⁰⁸ Similar protests were later made about Southwark Park. The MBW defended itself by noting that it was merely following OW policy, in which "the surrounding land has always been reserved for building purposes, notably in the case of Regents Park with very beneficial results."¹⁰⁹ However, by 1872 the MBW not only retreated but pressed the OW to drop its own building plans for Victoria Park.¹¹⁰ In all three parks, building plans ultimately failed under public pressure.

In addition to the OW and MBW, and later LCC, the Corporation of London played a part in the creation of new London parks with numerous financial contributions. Its long campaign to save Epping Forest, after various court battles, Parliamentary bills, and committee investigations, finally succeeded in 1882. After 1869, no new municipal parks opened for another twenty years, but virtually all London's commons were taken under municipal control in this period, and in 1887 four royal parks were transferred to the MBW.

Once the LCC replaced the MBW in 1889, the pace of new park creation accelerated. Unlike the MBW, the LCC acquired small inner-city spaces as well as large parks by using the resources of private park societies. Only a few months after its formation, the park committee, managed by Brabazon, decided

that it is not desirable for the Council to initiate proceedings for the laying out and opening of small disused burial-grounds as places of recreation; but that, in the event of this work being done by private or other associations, the question of maintaining any such places as the Council may be requested to take over, be considered,

and more than a dozen were taken over at that time.¹¹¹ The LCC did not acquire every potential open space suggested to it, however. An 1892 MPGA suggestion that the LCC acquire "a number of open spaces, with a view to providing work for the unemployed" was rejected.¹¹² But by 1897, the policy of letting private groups acquire small spaces had ceded to

now in the midst of a large population, and are invaluable as places of recreation.¹¹⁷

But on the whole the LCC clearly served as London's premier park authority, with well over 200 open spaces by 1898, ranging from tiny strips, some managed by local vestries, to large commons and parks.¹¹⁸ It was frequently compared favorably with the OW. The two park authorities continued to operate their parks independently, but frequently consulted each other about park policy.

Birmingham. The OW played no role in park creation in Birmingham, and relationships there between national and local park authorities proved less than cordial. In 1876, the city's mayor commented about past attempts to solicit government funds for parks:

an application was made to the Commissioners of Woods and Forests in London for assistance in furtherance of the object, but the Commissioners replied -- as all Government bodies from that time to this had replied to similar applications -- that they had no money for provincial purposes. (Laughter).¹¹⁹

Later in the century relations improved, but only to the point of consultations about park policy.

But despite discussions about municipal parks in Birmingham's town council as early as 1844, municipal funds were then devoted to public baths rather than parks. As one historian has commented: "the open country was still within easy reach of the town and in any case working hours were so long that people had little leisure."¹²⁰ Birmingham's first public parks were thus the result of private dona-

tions. Adderley and Calthorpe Parks, donated by and named for local landowners, opened in 1856 and 1857 respectively. Adderley Park was initially managed by a private committee, but was transferred to municipal management in 1862. Aston Park, located outside city boundaries, was opened by a private company in 1858, but became a municipal park in 1864. Cannon Hill Park was the 1873 donation of Louisa Ryland, who also donated Small Heath Park in 1879. The city's first recreation ground, opened in 1877, was also a private donation to ameliorate "one of the great wants of our town ... play-grounds for the poor children."¹²¹

However, by the early 1870s the park committee manifested a new eagerness to purchase public parks, making inquiries and beginning negotiations over sites. Joseph Chamberlain, as mayor, was instrumental in this new policy, remarking in 1876: "it was the duty of the Town Council, as representing and caring for the whole community, to provide similar advantages for all, and to make all partakers in the enjoyments which would otherwise be confined to a few."¹²² That year, the first two wholly municipally-purchased parks, Highgate and Summerfield, opened and signaled the onset of the "municipal gospel" in Birmingham. In ensuing years, large numbers of public parks and playgrounds opened in Birmingham, since as a later mayor noted: "It was only in their corporate capacity that [the public] could obtain such benefits."¹²³ Birmingham was the first British city, in

1878, to obtain legislation for the conversion of disused burial grounds into public gardens, and its program became a model for national legislation in 1884.

Both donations and city purchases of public parks in Birmingham continued at a rapid pace into the twentieth century, with 14 open spaces in 1892, and 81 by 1915, some of these acquired through a 1911 expansion of the city's boundaries.¹²⁴ Charles Vince sees "a determined effort to enlarge the provision of parks, gardens and playgrounds, and to make them more serviceable" in the early twentieth century; for this purpose the Council was willing to spend public money."¹²⁵ In several cases, the City Council directed the park committee to purchase land for parks even when the committee itself had voted against them.

As in London, private citizens pressed for the creation of parks in their own neighborhoods. In 1890, a "numerously signed Memorial from inhabitants, property owners, ratepayers, and manufacturers" petitioned the Council to acquire land which opened two years later as the Walmer Recreation Ground.¹²⁶ Other citizens were even more active. In 1902, Alexander Chance headed a committee which raised money for Lightwoods Park from "a large number of persons, rich and poor, who helped according to their means."¹²⁷ Four years later the same group raised £42,000 of the £70,000 purchase price of Warley Woods so that it could be preserved as public space.¹²⁸ Petitions frequently arrived from local

vestries, with a large number in 1894 after the City Council had instructed the park committee to acquire more recreation grounds. Even the Labour Party submitted a petition for a new recreation ground in 1906.¹²⁹ On the other hand, one project for a public park was obstructed by neighbors who "are most distinctly opposed to any such project on account of the damage that is likely to follow if the roughs are let in."¹³⁰ However, its generally park-favoring culture helped Birmingham compensate for initial delays in park creation.

Bath. Bath's first "public" park was opened by a group of private citizens in 1830, and remained the only one in the city for more than half a century. Given the city's relatively small size and easy access to the countryside, neither private groups nor the city council showed particular interest in more open spaces. One petition to the city council in 1874 to take over a private garden for the public was turned down.¹³¹ Bath's first municipal park, Hedgemoor Park, was created only as the result of a landslide which made the land useless for building. Once complete, however, it was praised by the Chronicle for its location "in a quarter where from the density of the population it will be particularly advantageous, both on the score of health and enjoyment."¹³²

This first municipal park then created demands for more in other parts of the city. One journalist wrote

In the interest of the rising generation, and for the comfort of the burghers, it is very desirable that such recreation grounds should be provided at convenient spots. In many towns the authorities have discharged this duty, with results that parents, children, and quiet-loving citizens all appreciate.¹³³

The mayor's opening speech cited the park's role "as a lung opener to those who lived in their narrow alleys and crowded rooms," and hoped "it might be the means of carrying many away from pernicious temptations."¹³⁴ Two years later, the city council formed a committee to oversee Hedgemoor Park and "to select suitable sites for playgrounds in four districts of the city including cricket and football fields."¹³⁵ Residents of various neighborhoods petitioned the committee to create new recreation grounds for them, and several were opened in the next few years. As in London and Birmingham, disused burial grounds were considered for conversion to small public gardens.

Bath's second large municipal park, Henrietta Park, was presented to the city by a private citizen in 1895 and opened to the public at the Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Only in 1898, when part of scenic Beechen Cliff was bought by a "building syndicate," did the park committee begin serious negotiations for the purchase of a large park, which opened as Alexandra Park in 1902, "one of the best examples of the vigilance of the City Council that could be provided."¹³⁶ Subsequent parks then followed at a leisurely pace. Thus,

municipal park creation in Bath lagged behind bigger and more industrial cities such as London and Birmingham.

Case Studies of Park Creation

In practice, campaigns to create new public parks and the actual process of selecting, buying and laying out land rarely flowed smoothly from start to finish. To illustrate this point, three case studies of early parks opened between 1830 and 1872 have been selected. These examples, from London, Birmingham and Bath, show the importance of both an initial stimulus from private groups, sometimes followed by a period of private management, and the eventual shift to municipal ownership.

London: Hampstead Heath. In 1831 Sir Thomas Wilson, lord of the manor of Hampstead Heath north of central London, made efforts to build on its common land. Though protests from local residents halted this plan, Wilson continued to threaten the heath in subsequent years.¹³⁷ Hampstead Heath, with its fresh air and elevated topography, had long been used for recreation, and residents petitioned the OW to take it over as a royal park, arguing: "Hampstead Heath has for many years been and is a favourite resort of the Inhabitants of the Metropolis ... and is frequented by large numbers of the population, of all Classes," but without success.¹³⁸

The Hampstead-Heath Preservation Association then petitioned the MBW, where board members disagreed over conflicting needs to preserve the heath and to save money. One MBW member, Thomas Turner, published a pamphlet in 1857 supporting the heath's preservation: "By most it would be considered a public calamity, and somewhat of a public disgrace, if the Heath were suffered to be built upon, or its picturesque character to be materially impaired."¹³⁹ The same year an MBW committee reported: "it is important that the Heath and the adjoining land referred to, be purchased for the public use at as early a period as possible."¹⁴⁰ The Hampstead Vestry then had a bill introduced into Parliament authorizing it to purchase the heath, but was opposed by the MBW, which wanted control itself.¹⁴¹ Despite subsequent Parliamentary pressure for the MBW to acquire the land, however, no action was taken.

In 1865, shortly after the Wimbledon Common case, Wilson announced his intention to enclose the heath and actually began building houses upon it. Public protests and a lawsuit by the local committee with the help of the CPS ensued, but Wilson died in 1868 before a settlement was reached. His brother, who succeeded him, ultimately agreed to sell his manorial rights over the Heath to the MBW for £45,000, and the MBW took formal possession of the heath as a public space in 1872. Hampstead Heath was the CPS's first case, "perhaps the most important of all the London Commons

... from its position, and its natural beauties, and salubrity, which make it more popular and frequented than any other."¹⁴² But though it praised the preservation of the heath, the CPS thought the price paid "excessive, although far below the building value," arguing that further legal action might have obtained the Heath for free.¹⁴³ The case shows the extent of public and private cooperation required for the creation of many new public parks.

The creation of Hampstead Heath did not end in 1872, however. As public transportation improved, the area became more densely settled and more Londoners visited the Heath. Private land adjoining the Heath was soon threatened with building. After a public meeting at a local tavern in 1884, "an influential Committee was formed to promote the extension of Hampstead Heath by the addition of about 300 acres" by purchasing the area known as Parliament Hill from two adjacent landowners.¹⁴⁴ Shaw Lefevre led the committee, Brabazon was a member and Hill one of its treasurers. In 1885, Shaw Lefevre led a deputation representing various open space societies to request the MBW to buy the land. He even hosted a garden party on the summit of Parliament Hill attended by "upwards of 400 ladies and gentlemen," which inspired the Illustrated London News to comment: "we believe that no greater boon could be granted to the people of London ... the loss of Parliament Hill ... would be a calam-

ity to all London which could never be compensated."¹⁴⁵

The committee itself argued:

The money spent upon the recreation of the people of the metropolis has been hitherto but a comparatively small share of the total expenditure on public improvements, whilst expenditure in such direction is daily becoming more and more important to the health of the inhabitants of the metropolis.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the MBW voted down the purchase by "a large majority."¹⁴⁷ The Hampstead Heath committee did not give up, however, but obtained both Parliamentary authorization and pledges from the City of London Charities and local vestries. The MBW ultimately agreed in 1887 to pay half the purchase price of £300,000 for Parliament Hill, with the rest coming from two local parishes, the City of London and a public subscription campaign, which was not completed until 1889. Owen argues that the MBW's funding finally came only "because it found public and newspaper opinion more formidable than the protests of a number of vestries."¹⁴⁸

These same activists continued to lobby to enlarge Hampstead Heath. A second addition, the Golder's Hill estate, was made in 1898, again with a local committee and the MPGA assisting in the campaign, and contributions coming from the Hampstead Vestry as well as the LCC. Another Hampstead Heath Extension Council was formed in 1903 to lobby for the addition of the Wyldes estate to the Heath. Again, the group overcame initial LCC refusals to obtain funding for the purchase, finally completed in 1907, with

half coming from seven local government bodies and the rest from private subscriptions. While wealthy donors were always important in such park campaigns, this case included several donors who gave only a shilling, and one who gave only 6d.¹⁴⁹

Birmingham: Aston Park. Rather than a manorial common, Aston Park was a private family estate put up for sale. Even more than in the case of Hampstead Heath, private initiative proved crucial in opening the park to the public. The town council first considered buying the estate for a park in 1850, but did not come to a decision in time for the sellers.¹⁵⁰ In 1856, the council had another opportunity to buy Aston, but dropped the idea as too expensive.¹⁵¹ Finally, in 1857, a private group of "gentlemen" formed a limited liability company to purchase the park, issuing 40,000 shares at a guinea apiece to pay the £35,000 purchase price. When the shares did not sell well, they made "an appeal to the working-classes."¹⁵² A public meeting was held, followed by a fete in the park, and the campaign began in earnest.

One of the "gentlemen" involved in the project boasted in 1857 about the "great difference between the movement which is now being made to secure this park, and any which hitherto have been made for such a purpose," namely that "It is proposed to make the people the purchasers of their own park."¹⁵³ He stressed the fact that

many thousands of the shares are taken by bona fide working men, and ... the middle and upper classes were not applied to until the artisans had proved their desire and their willingness to make some pecuniary sacrifice, to prove the strength of their desire to possess the Park.¹⁵⁴

Conway suggests that this plan "appealed to the middle-class aspirations of Birmingham's artisans."¹⁵⁵

With contributions by various classes, then, the purchase of Aston Park was completed in 1858. After a petition by the Mayor, Queen Victoria even arrived on one of her rare visits to Birmingham to open the park with pomp and ceremony. But despite making a small entrance charge, the project quickly ran into financial difficulty. The same citizens who had praised the workers' initiative now criticized the park for "pandering to the demands of a certain class of visitors for sensational and vulgar performances," while accusations of mismanagement flowed freely.¹⁵⁶ After a trapeze artist was killed while performing at the park in 1863, the Queen requested the city to take over the park in order to promote "rational recreation" and restore the dignity conferred by her visit.¹⁵⁷ By this time, the park company was facing bankruptcy. However, the Town Council initially rejected the idea, partly because Aston Park lay outside city limits, and it agreed to buy the park only after private donors raised £7,000 of the £26,000 purchase price.¹⁵⁸ Aston Park finally reopened as a Birmingham municipal park in 1864.

Bath: Royal Victoria Park. In Bath, the pattern of private activism in park creation found its most extreme form. The Royal Victoria Park was first proposed in 1830 by a group of citizens interested in improving their own amenities and in revitalizing Bath's declining reputation as a spa. Though reasons ranging from creating employment to offering fresher air to the town's invalids were cited, the Royal Victoria Park Committee (hereafter RVPC), as it became, targeted "those more particularly who are engaged in business" by appealing to the economic consequences of parks for Bath's tourist trade.¹⁵⁹ Historians agree that economic factors were paramount here. Conway notes: "The main reasons for the development of Royal Victoria Park appear to have been economic ones," and Lasdun agrees: "Their chief incentive was economic: to improve the tourist facilities of Bath in the hope of reversing the effect of recession," though she also cites "a philanthropic desire to provide recreational facilities."¹⁶⁰

After a public meeting presided over by the mayor, the RVPC began preparations to transform what were then the Bath Commons into a public park. The city leased the land from the freemen, and private subscriptions of £7,000 or £8,000 were raised to fund the laying out.¹⁶¹ Later that year, Princess Victoria and her mother toured the nearly-completed "Bath Park Improvements" along with the mayor and "a great number of gentlemen and tradesmen of the city."¹⁶² The

park was then named the Royal Victoria Park with the Princess's permission, or perhaps at her mother's demand; it is difficult to be sure.

In contrast to Birmingham's Aston Park, Victoria Park continued to be managed by this private committee for almost a century, though rent was paid to the city for the land. The committee's appeals for subscriptions, and occasional threats to ban non-subscribers from the park, were accompanied by references to the evils of municipal control, "a step which your Committee think would be much regretted."¹⁶³ However, actual ownership of the park land was officially transferred from the city's "freemen" to the city corporation in 1879, and the same Parliamentary Act gave the city the power to manage the park itself if it so desired.¹⁶⁴

During the 1880s and 1890s, as the RVPC struggled for funding, the city council's Corporate Property Committee funded buildings and other physical fixtures in the park, and made necessary repairs. This situation did not please all citizens in Bath. A journalist commented in 1889: "the constant impecuniousness complained of is strengthening the feeling that as the Park is city property so should it be kept up by the city, and not by voluntary subscriptions: all would then contribute to the support of an institution all are at liberty to enjoy."¹⁶⁵ But an 1898 attempt by two councillors to make the group's lease dependent on free

access for the public during band concerts failed, as the RVPC successfully contended that its efforts saved the city money. In fact, as subscriptions declined with the opening of municipal parks, the rent it paid to the city was reduced, and after 1915 the city actually made financial grants to the RVPC. During World War I it became apparent that the privately-run public park could no longer survive, while the new municipal parks were flourishing, and that after the war ended new arrangements would have to be made. Beginning in 1919 the park was managed by a joint committee of RVPC members and city council members, and the city took over the park completely in 1921.

Conclusion

These examples illustrate the variable obstacles faced by campaigns to open public parks as well as general trends in park creation. Public health through recreation was a key (though never sole) motive everywhere, allaying fears of epidemics and promoting physical fitness in London and Birmingham, and attracting invalid tourists in Bath. Moral reform followed close behind as a reason to create parks, particularly given the common Victorian perception of links between physical and moral health. In both cases, parks offered alternatives to the status quo: fresh air instead of contagion and filth, exposure to nature rather than beer or gambling. Aestheticists stressed the visual impact of

parks, but without addressing the actual functioning of such spaces in the city, and economic factors proved less important in park creation except in Bath.

In all three cities, a mix of private and public action proved crucial to the creation of parks. Private efforts, whether in the form of organized reform groups, petitions from residents or, more rarely, donations by wealthy individuals, nearly always provided the initial stimulus to new parks. Citizens of all classes worked to create the perception of a public duty for both private individuals and governments to help cities, and significantly, park subscription campaigns typically elicited contributions from citizens at all economic levels. Private park societies continued to grow through the end of the nineteenth century, at which point municipal authorities took over the dominant role in park creation.

Local government eventually replaced private societies altogether as instigators and managers of new parks. As public parks increased in number and became focal points in city geography, they demanded more formal management and thus led to the expansion of municipal government structures to accommodate open spaces. Once established, these departments developed momentum leading to the creation of even more parks. The greater involvement of municipal government in this aspect of city life focused attention on park use and its benefits to citizens. During the 1880s and 1890s,

increased interest in sports and physical fitness coincided with improvement in mortality rates, and park creation turned to focus upon smaller recreation grounds and playgrounds in response.

Through the creation and use of public parks, growing cities developed both new urban cultures and new forms of public authority. Public parks gradually progressed from remedies for urban crises to hallmarks of urban pride and central elements in national identity. The remaining chapters of this dissertation demonstrate the role played by public parks in this broadening of public culture in British cities between 1870 and 1920.

1. Sir Robert Hunter, "The Movement for the Inclosure and Preservation of Open Lands," Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 60 (1897), p.392.

2. Anthony S. Wohl, Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain (London: Methuen, 1984), p.118.

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CHAPTER 3: CONFLICT IN THE PUBLIC AND THE PARK

Introduction

Once public parks had been created, debate about their proper use regularly occurred between different groups of park users as well as between park users and park authorities. While any type of park use could result in disagreement, including mundane disputes about priority in sports grounds or rights of way, the conflicts most significant for public culture overall fell into three categories. These issues were the boundaries of the parkgoing public, the degree to which park rules should encourage more civilized behavior in the parks, and the relationship between politics and public space.

Each of these three controversies illuminated a different facet of the central dilemma for park users and managers. Should public parks cater to, and foster the development of, the ideal citizen? Or on the contrary, should parks merely accommodate diversity in public behavior without any restraint other than existing laws? This question inspired vigorous opinions on both sides by parkgoers, and demanded difficult decisions by park managers who created and enforced park bye-laws. The perceived opportunity to influence the future of urban society conferred a sense of urgency on debates about public parks.

First, even as park use increased, the public community still remained amorphous with ill-defined boundaries. Though by definition public parks served all members of the public, those parkgoers not meeting specific, though varying, standards of respectability could be excluded. Thus, up to the mid-nineteenth century, lower-class citizens found royal park admission sometimes denied. Conversely, wealthy and socially influential parkgoers often acquired special privileges in park use forbidden to the public at large. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, class discrimination in park admission had largely been overcome, with "respectable" workers now eagerly admitted, only to generate new efforts to exclude "verminous" persons from definitions of the public and from parks.

Second, broad-based efforts to use parks as a platform for reforming society met stiff resistance. Attempts to deny park admission to disease-carriers and degenerates signalled a larger battle over public behavior inside parks. Reform efforts stemmed from different but overlapping campaigns promoting "rational recreation," religion and sports, or attempting to suppress "indecent" sexual behavior. Code words such as "rational," "respectable" and "civilized" were often interpreted in contradictory ways by various groups, all claiming to represent the public interest. Park authorities wavered between alliances with

and resistance to private reform societies interested in influencing park behavior.

The third facet of controversy over park use concerned political behavior. Londoners struggled to acquire the right of assembly in public parks for political purposes. Though designed primarily for leisure activities, public parks eventually became political spaces and largely contributed to the development of a broader political culture, at least in London. Public meetings produced the most physical confrontations occurring in parks, occasionally developing into full-blown riots.

Conflicts within public parks were framed by park by-laws drafted by park managers and enforced by park-keepers or police. These guidelines varied from one park authority to another, even within the same city, and they also changed significantly over time with the shifting balance of power between local park authorities, Parliament and the Home Office, and public opinion. Public opinion itself fluctuated over this period. Existing class and gender tensions influenced both reformers and their targets. Female athletes gained public support as preachers lost it, while lower-class parkgoers were reclassified as respectable or reprehensible, as discrimination based on dress evolved into a more sophisticated rejection of morally deviant members of society by the end of the nineteenth century.

Comparisons of official records, the press and individual complaints to park authorities illustrate the slow and uneven process through which the splinters and fragments of Victorian society fused into a broader, if still unstable, public culture in twentieth century parks. Different interpretations of the public and of park use contended for victory. This chapter will investigate the evolution of the three types of conflicts in public park use -- defining, reforming and politicizing the public -- whose eventual resolution was integral to the development of more consensual park use and public culture.

Defining the Public

Conflict began at the very gates of parks designated as open to a "public" whose definition was by no means fixed. Admission to public parks could be, and at different times was, denied on grounds of class, age and cleanliness; gender and ethnicity proved less important characteristics. Furthermore, particularly in royal parks, some park users enjoyed special privileges forbidden to others. Those refused admission or privileges protested their exclusion, as controversy over the boundaries of the public continued into the twentieth century.

Class Distinctions. The earliest park admission standards followed class lines, a holdover from the

eighteenth-century practice of admitting only fashionable society to London's royal parks, which continued into the early nineteenth century. In 1856, the Illustrated London News noted in an article on St. James's Park:

Within a comparatively recent period the gate was barred to servants in livery, and even to soldiers in uniform. Persons in working attire or carrying burdens are still denied entrance at the discretion of the gatekeepers, who have sometimes turned away studious members of our own craft, merely because they were conveying home a few just-purchased volumes under their arms. Dogs, also -- to say nothing of children -- must obtain a permit.¹

This definition of the public clearly excluded many London residents, and led to criticism. One 1846 letter to the Times argued: "What is the use of this excessive exclusiveness ...? It is enough to make any person's blood boil to see a well-dressed mechanic refused admission into a park considered public."²

By 1870, with a broader understanding of public space and more liberal social behavior, restrictions on workers as such disappeared. No municipal park in London, first opened in 1869, ever had such limits. In Birmingham, public parks welcomed industrial workers. In Calthorpe Park in 1861, "The majority of the Visitors are artizans and their families," while Cannon Hill Park opened in 1873 with a "carriage drive and a footway side by side," not "exclusively for one class" but "open to, and used by rich and poor alike," showing a commitment to broad class representation.³

Though class divisions created some conflict in park use, class status alone no longer determined park admission.

Social prestige garnered special privileges within parks for a much longer period, however. Again, some privileges stemmed from long traditions in London's royal parks. Certain people were issued keys to the royal parks and could then use the parks after hours. Privately-owned carriages and later cars could drive around Hyde Park while taxis were forbidden until 1924. But the most resented park privilege given to fashionable society was the leasing out of private areas within royal parks, especially in Regent's Park. The park had originally been planned as a site for elegant villas surrounding a never-built royal palace, and had been opened to the public by degrees as the Crown changed its plans. By the late nineteenth century, enclosures still closed to the public in Regent's Park included several villas with individual gardens, a subscription garden for wealthy tenants of Crown property surrounding the park, and grounds leased to the Zoological Society, the Royal Toxophilite [archery] Society and the Royal Botanic Society.

Public pressure arose to open these areas to all parkgoers. The Botanic Society and the Zoo, discussed in Chapter 6, supported their claims to public space with efforts to represent the nation and empire. Protests about

the private subscription garden, on the other hand, focused entirely on public boundaries and will be discussed here. The OW, which managed the royal parks, had lost control of this garden when the Office of Woods and Works split administratively in 1851. Conflict thus occurred not only between members of the public and park authorities but just as vehemently between different government departments. The OW considered it unfair to devote parts of a public park to privileged individuals. "The general public may ... justly complain that they are excluded from a garden which is practically kept up at their expense in order that it may be enjoyed by a few rich residents in the neighbourhood," one official noted in 1880.⁴ In contrast, the Office of Woods and those who enjoyed these privileges argued that the public had enough space already, and furthermore that the wealthy residents paid a fair price for their privileges.

Class awareness clearly played a role in this conflict. The Office of Woods complained that "If the enclosure is thrown open" and "frequented in the same manner and by the same class" as had access to the public part, "such an occupation of the enclosure would absolutely destroy the amenities" for wealthy tenants.⁵ The Toxophilite Society, also threatened with repossession after public protests, envisioned the "public" as opponents in similar terms even in 1913:

No doubt the Public have a claim to a fair share of the Park, but ... Professional men, members of the Civil Service and others, who from the nature of their occupations are precluded from leaving their places of business till late in the afternoon should also be considered.⁶

In these views, "public" referred to commoners as opposed to privileged Londoners who interpreted public claims as a threat to their own rights.

But the balance of power shifted away from exclusions of workers from parks, and by the late nineteenth century most Londoners viewed "public" as an inclusive term unrelated to class. Upper-class unity fragmented over this issue. In 1882, an "influential deputation" called on the OW to protest against the private subscription garden, and stressed

the extent to which the Royal Parks are appreciated by the Poorer classes and their excellent behaviour therein ... the indignation with which that portion of the public saw themselves excluded from the enjoyment of one of the most beautiful portions of a pleasure ground which they could not but look upon as their own;

the group further noted that "a meeting had recently been held in which the views which they expressed temperately had been insisted upon in very strong language and even with threats."⁷ Shaw Lefevre, then OW First Commissioner, endorsed this broader interpretation of the parkgoing public. He thought it "both right and politic to accede to the desire of the public," since the private garden was "not in harmony with the now advanced ideas which obtain at

present," and deplored the "tone [of] the Crown Lessees ... protesting against the admission of the 'Marylebone roughs' to the reservation."⁸ With his support, the subscription garden was reduced in size, with the remainder divided into two parts guaranteed private only until 1922 when the Crown tenants' leases ended. This new public area became an ornamental garden where, in an effort to placate Crown tenants, children would be discouraged. In 1913, after a Parliamentary investigation sparked by public complaints, even more private land in Regent's Park was opened to the public.

Crown tenants geared themselves for one last battle to preserve their privileges in the park as 1922 approached. Admitting the public "would greatly depreciate the Annual Value of your Petitioners' Houses," noted one letter, while another more pointedly stressed the residents' "being deprived of all playground space for their children except such as is common to the slum children as well."⁹ But by this time, popular agreement on broad meanings of "public" and "public parks" overwhelmed these last holdouts for class privilege. In 1921 the Toxophilite Society's land was reclaimed and turned into public tennis courts, and the private subscription garden was thrown open to general public access the following year.

Such private aristocratic areas never existed in Birmingham or Bath parks. A tennis club requesting exclusive privileges in Birmingham's Small Heath Park in 1883 was informed that the park committee would not "grant the exclusive use of any portion of the ground to any club or party."¹⁰ Instead, a different kind of privileged park use developed in these two cities, in which private organizations could rent out portions of public parks for the day. Though less permanent, these privileges also occasioned some criticism. In 1868, the Band of Hope Union held a festival in Birmingham's Aston Park and charged admission to the park that day, but after protests were received, the park committee decided that "Aston Park should not be closed to the public nor any charge made for admission to the Park."¹¹ Nevertheless, when a similar request was made for an agricultural exhibition in Aston Park in 1873, one which the park committee wanted to support, a new bye-law was passed: "The Council may close any of the Parks wholly or in part, on any days in the year, not exceeding seven days in the whole, and ... may charge or permit any person or persons to whom the use of the Park may have been given, to charge for admission, on any of such days."¹² Following this decision, donors of several new Birmingham parks, including Cannon Hill, Small Heath and Lightwoods Parks,

specified that their parks could never be closed to the public in this manner.

Numerous private festivals of religious and civic organizations occurred in Birmingham's parks in the following years, and sometimes led to complaints. In 1912 residents near Handsworth Park complained: "It is surely bad enough that a Public Park is closed for two days for a private concern, which should be able to provide its own ground, without compelling us to suffer the intolerable and continual noise of hurdy-gurdy organs, etc."¹³ However, national legislation in 1890 allowed local councils to charge for entry to public parks on a limited number of days, and to close parks to the public so that they could be used by public charities or institutions, though not for more than twelve days a year or on Sundays or public holidays.¹⁴ This act legitimized Birmingham's policy.

In accordance with this legislation, Bath park authorities reserved the right to close parks for private festivals in their 1898 byelaws, and similar patterns of park use occurred there, including meetings by the YMCA in 1911, the National Union of Railwaymen in 1916, and the Red Cross in 1917. No conflicts arose about these meetings until 1919, when the Twerton Cooperative Society's request to hold a fete in Sydney Gardens was refused, leading to protests and accusations of business favoritism. But by the

turn of the century, the most vehement dispute about access to public parks involved discrimination based not on class or private organization, but rather on disease.

Verminous Persons. Campaigns against "verminous" parkgoers suddenly appeared in London around 1900. They quickly gained press and public support, uniting diverse sectors of the community. While press coverage was due partly to the summer "silly season," the volume of citizens' letters to newspapers and complaints to park authorities showed widespread and genuine concern. Park authorities were sympathetic to fears of vermin, but found their power to exclude anyone from space officially designated as public legally limited as well as ideologically troubling. While most working people, now considered respectable, were eagerly admitted to parks, unclean, unemployed men and women were deemed intentionally deviant from social norms and therefore unworthy of sympathy or public rights such as access to parks. The emergence of this discourse on disease, not previously a matter for complaint, showed the new lines along which public definitions were being drawn.

The first complaints, in the late 1890s, mentioned vagrants and loafers generally, but vermin and disease soon became the most objectionable aspects of these parkgoers. As sports gained popularity, respectability now meant cleanliness and physical health rather than social status.

In 1899 one MP questioned the OW about "the number of unclean and verminous persons who, especially in warm weather, pass the night in Green Park, and Hyde Park," and argued either for complete exclusion or, failing that, "places for these persons to sleep in; hedged, and fenced round; so that the general public can be warned to avoid them during the day, and thus escape the present risk of unwitting contagion from the seats, and grass."¹⁵ His plan for isolation failed, but his ideas continued to spread.

Discussions of verminous parkgoers contrasted "respectable" people of all classes with those who ignored new and higher cultural standards of cleanliness. The Saturday Review argued that while "The freedom of the subject will doubtless be invoked in protection of such pariahs," park authorities must "protect the freedom of honest and respectable people by assigning to the unclean and foul-mouthed a certain portion of this vast area."¹⁶ And the Daily Chronicle concurred: "Poverty may be due to no fault of his own. But the elementary duty of every citizen is to keep himself clean, and to the incorrigibly and persistently dirty no mercy should be shown."¹⁷ Similar complaints came from local borough councils. St. Marylebone suggested better supervision and lighting in Hyde Park as well as "Cleansing & purification of public seats" and "Removal of verminous persons" in 1902.¹⁸

Verminous persons posed a particular threat to innocent children, citizens thought. One mother protested to her local council in 1904 against allowing "the children of our schools" to see in parks "day after day the loathsome, indecent and degrading spectacle of the lowest dregs of humanity, stretched in all attitudes and in every degree of filth," and wanted tramps either segregated or removed.¹⁹ This concern to protect children from contamination extended through all classes. The Daily Telegraph complained: "not only the well-to-do, but small tradesmen and self-respecting artisans have already had to forbid their children the outdoor life which is so essential to their health and happiness."²⁰

Letters to the press from victims of lice showed that contagion was a real and not merely imagined threat. One Londoner whose children caught lice in Hyde Park in 1913 protested to his MP, who forwarded his letter on to the OW. The OW's reply shows that they considered the problem a serious one:

The question of disinfecting the grass has been considered but the use of a solution of paraffin or similar liquid would be very objectionable and disinfectants would tend to destroy the grass.

Fortunately these undesirables tend to congregate into certain sections of the Parks and ... children should not be taken to those particular spots.²¹

But though sympathetic, park authorities could not enforce the exclusion of verminous persons from parks. The LCC

wrote the OW that in the municipal parks, "special arrangements are made at some places for cleansing the seats," but "No special measures are adopted by the Council for dealing with such persons, and they are not interfered with except when committing offences against the by-laws."²² The Hyde Park police likewise found that though verminous persons' "filthy and ragged appearance gives offence to the better classes who use the Park ... the filthy appearance of these unfortunate persons is no offence under which the Police can take action," making any new policy difficult.²³

Most complaints identified the central royal parks, which were also open later at night, as the most infected. The LCC received fewer complaints about the municipal parks, and also had a legal advantage over the OW, since its new bye-laws merely needed Home Office approval, while the OW had to go to Parliament to change rules for the royal parks. In 1892, the LCC had adopted a byelaw specifically prohibiting "gipsies, hawkers, ... beggars, and rogues and vagabonds" from municipal parks, and in 1898 its park-keepers were instructed to remove verminous persons from seats and "in their discretion, to prevent any such persons entering a park or open space."²⁴ These rules showed a new definition of the public emerging, one more inclusive in class terms but newly exclusive in its emphasis on cleanliness and health.

Not all Londoners agreed that verminous parkgoers should lose their rights to use public parks. In an interview with the press, an OW official commented on such defense efforts:

"There are people," he said, "who would raise the cry that this was an attempt to rob the poorest class of their liberty and their equal right with all other classes to the use of the public parks. Of course, it would be nothing of the kind; it would rather be an attempt to make the parks more accessible to all classes,"

and the reporter evidently agreed: "the parks of London promise to become not so much the resort of the general public as the monopoly of one particular class, and that the very class who do nothing to maintain them."²⁵ A Hyde Park policeman indignantly recalled his own difficulties with verminous persons:

one never knew when some interfering person or other would come to the policeman and demand to know the reason [a vagrant] was disturbed -- "What harm has he done? It is a free Park," and ... these busybodies ... will even then write and complain of the constable's "unnecessary interference."²⁶

The press deprecated defenders of the verminous and urged a rule of exclusion despite its dubious legality: "the Council and the authorities who govern the Royal Parks may safely rely upon the support of public opinion, if they will introduce it into their bye-laws. The tramp rarely takes 'counsel's opinion' on such matters."²⁷

Under the combined pressure of the press and parkgoers' complaints, the OW First Commissioner finally introduced a new royal park rule in 1904, which specified:

No idle and disorderly person, or rogue or vagabond, or person in an unclean or verminous condition, shall loiter or remain in the park, or lie upon or occupy the ground, or any of the seats thereof; and it shall be lawful for any park-keeper to exclude or remove from the park any person committing any breach of this rule.²⁸

This prohibition then raised the issue of whether the OW had the legal authority to exclude anyone from the royal parks in the first place. Legal opinions taken in 1856 and 1866 on this issue had been inconclusive, and the Police Commissioner doubted "whether the law of trespass can be made applicable to a particular section of the public for any reason, whilst the free enjoyment of the Parks is allowed to the Public generally," though he concluded: "it seems reasonable to take the risk," since "the exclusion or removal of the persons in question would be in accordance with public sentiment and for the public welfare, and is not likely to be resisted or resented with effect by the individuals themselves."²⁹

To avoid provoking protests, however, the police and park-keepers were instructed "to proceed discreetly and slowly" and above all "not to interfere with respectable poor men and women," underlining the new definition of the public as clean rather than prosperous.³⁰ In addition, fu-

ture park benches would be ordered with seat dividers to prevent anyone lying down on them. Park-keepers clearly approved of the new policy. A police officer hoped the rule "will be the means of exterminating these objectionable-looking characters from the Park altogether."³¹ One protest was received from a resident near Green Park in 1910 that the police were too vigorous in their inspections of park users, but on the whole the policy sparked little controversy for the next decade, and no new complaints about verminous parkgoers were recorded before 1913, when an OW official summarized its enforcement policy: "Persons who are obviously in a verminous condition found sitting on public seats anywhere in the Park and more specially near Rotten Row, are moved on."³²

Complaints increased with the outbreak of World War I, however, as military use of public parks focused more attention on them and on parkgoers' behavior. A London magistrate remarked in 1914 of "these dirty verminous people ... [who] spread vermin among young children ... it seems to be a disgrace and a scandal. These people ought not to be allowed to sleep in the Park."³³ Again, the OW was caught in a dilemma, since "Verminous persons are disliked, but mistakes as to accusing non-verminous persons for being verminous are disliked still more."³⁴ New legislation for the royal parks was delayed by the war, and did not pass

Parliament until 1926. The LCC had continuing difficulties as well. The Home Secretary had agreed in 1908 to allow a new LCC bye-law excluding verminous persons, but lengthy negotiations and war delays meant it did not become effective until 1928.

Interestingly, there seem to have been no complaints about verminous persons in Birmingham parks, and only one complaint was made in Bath, in 1882, that "The entrances to the Park ... have been lately infested with deformed and afflicted beggars of both sexes, who exhibit their afflictions in a manner repellent to the convalescent, and particularly objectionable to invalids."³⁵ No doubt vagrants in search of opportunities for casual labor in a time of high unemployment drifted more to the capital than to a resort like Bath, or even to Birmingham. But in addition, London's more stratified social structure, which had given birth to formal class discrimination in park admission early in the nineteenth century, had also focused more intense attention on questions of public definition in that city. Urban growth made civic identities more important, and while a consensus was achieved that class background should not determine public boundaries, the price of cross-class unity was a new form of exclusion. Discrimination against verminous persons made the public purer, cleaner and healthier in comparison,

and mirrored reform campaigns aimed at changing public behavior within parks.

Reforming the Public

Just as citizens differed over who belonged in the public and in the parks, they disagreed about the extent to which park behavior should be controlled. For some, the very idea of publicly-owned space meant that members of the public should be able to do whatever they wanted while in the parks. For others, public parks offered a unique opportunity for reform efforts. A newly defined public, in this view, should conform to a higher standard of civilized behavior in its representative space, and park authorities should use their powers to make bye-laws aimed at improving the public as a whole. These movements focused on various behavioral differences based on class, religious practice, gender, age and sexuality. Visions of how an ideal public should behave in public parks naturally differed, and reformers did not always agree on the proper steps to take. Some of the more important park behavior campaigns included those promoting temperance, religion, sports and sexual "decency," all of them overlapping in their goals and methods but also distinct.

Park authorities themselves expressed ambivalence about reforming public culture. Sometimes they supported reform,

passing new rules, improving enforcement, and asserting their authority over parkgoers. At other times, park managers dismissed public complaints or demands for stronger enforcement as the inevitable and unimportant output of cranks and prudes. Debates about whether, and how, to reform the parkgoing public illustrated both the novelty and malleability of the concepts of the public and of public space, and the importance citizens attached to them. This section will explore the development of several campaigns to reform public park behavior, resistance to such attempts, and their ultimate effects on park use. While not all reform efforts succeeded in specific goals, they did bring "respectable" parkgoers of different classes, genders, ages and religious beliefs closer together.

Authority in Public Parks. Before any reform efforts could occur, park managers had to establish their right to control public behavior in parks. The rhetoric of public space and public ownership posed obstacles to this by convincing parkgoers of their rights to do whatever they wanted. The OW First Commissioner had to justify his desire for the power to make park rules in Parliament in 1872, following several failed attempts:

the people of the metropolis were essentially friends of order and well-conducted; but among the 3,000,000 inhabitants of the metropolis there was a small percentage of ill-conducted and ill-conditioned people. ... He did not for a moment intend to confine the misbehaviour complained of to those

who were called 'roughs,' because there was frequently great misconduct practised by those who wore superfine cloth coats.³⁶

The idea of public ownership, widely and democratically defined, was reinforced by remarks like those of Mayor Joseph Chamberlain when opening a Birmingham park in 1876: "He confided it to the care of the people as their own property and for their benefit," and by his successor, George Baker, a few weeks later: "For all practical purposes, except for sale, the park is so much the property of every man and woman here as though you had the title deeds in your pockets."³⁷ Similar remarks were made at a Bath park opening in 1889: "The Corporation, in presenting them with that Park, was perhaps simply giving them back their own, and [the Mayor] asked them to look upon it as such."³⁸

Park authorities made conscientious efforts to enforce their bye-laws. But in the first decades of public park use, parkgoers caught breaking bye-laws frequently challenged the authority of park-keepers on grounds of public ownership. A park-keeper on Hampstead Heath who stopped children from swimming in one of the ponds reported in 1872 that their father "put himself in a passion" and said "it was taking away the rights of the public if the people could not do as they liked on the Heath."³⁹ The following year, a man whose children had picked flowers on the Heath made a similar complaint: "this jack-in-office ... is the paid

servant of the public not its master, there is no more insolent class than these men."⁴⁰ Such parkgoers interpreted public space to confer legitimacy on virtually any actions there.

This new relationship of authority, sometimes antithetical to social status, made park-keepers uncomfortable as well, and they sometimes took public challenges personally. The MBW park superintendent noted in regard to one frequent complainant about park policy:

Unfortunately Mr. Badcock has nothing to do ...
if your Committee agree to lay out a Park in such a way as will please everyone's taste, especially those having nothing to do, I fear you will not succeed. I have no hesitation in saying Mr. Badcock will be a source of trouble to you till you send his letters to the Waste Paper Basket.⁴¹

The superintendent of Finsbury Park huffed in response to another complaint: "I hope the time has not arrived when I must apologise to an impudent servant girl."⁴²

After the 1870s, however, parkgoers tended to demand the exercise of more authority rather than less. Sometimes these issues were serious: in 1905, a man was caught in Victoria Park indecently assaulting a little girl, but released by park-keepers who decided there was insufficient evidence for prosecution. A mob of infuriated parkgoers chased the man out of the park and killed him.⁴³ Other complaints were more trivial. An irate father expressed his "surprise at the decision of the Committee not to compensate him for

damage done to his children's shoes" after they walked into a marshy area on Hampstead Heath in 1899, and another man demanded compensation after being "attacked by a dog which tore his trousers" on the Heath in 1904.⁴⁴ In 1915, a Bath park committee member himself angrily noted of the recently-public Sydney Gardens: "the children were exceedingly rude and jeered at ladies who spoke to them ... there was no control at all over them."⁴⁵ Such complaints, whether minor or major, formed the basis for campaigns to reshape public behavior in the parks.

Rational Recreation. Campaigners for "rational recreation," the most general reform movement, pictured idealized middle-class citizens as models for the leisure behavior of workers and the poor, particularly to tempt them away from drink. Unlike conflicts over religious or women's uses of parks, rational recreation drew implicitly upon class differences, but with an important distinction between "respectable" and "degenerate" members of the lower classes. Reformers clearly hoped to make class distinctions less important by establishing a new standard for behavior for all members of the public, including the middle and upper classes. Parks played a role in this campaign by offering "rational" amusements such as sports, family picnics, and exposure to nature, while providing the additional advantage (for reformers) of prohibiting alcohol and gambling.

Rational recreation reformers wrote eloquently and lengthily on the evils of moral degeneracy and the benefits of rational leisure habits, but stumbled when it came to practical applications of their theories. Many seemed to envision reform almost as a form of osmosis, in which simply exposing the poor to healthier leisure activities in parks would automatically dislodge less desirable habits. As one reformer suggested in 1874: "Let us provide them with amusements of the right sort ... and we shall find that the better influences will gradually displace the bad, even amongst those whom it is the custom to designate the depraved and irreclaimable classes."⁴⁶ Similarly, the Association for the Improvement of Public Morals was formed in 1879 "to remove from the presence of the poor those low and corrupting sources of pleasure and amusement which are now so much the occasion of falling, and to substitute recreations and employments which will have a healthful influence."⁴⁷

In London, park authorities largely stood aside from this campaign, though they passed bye-laws against drinking, gambling and bad language. In Birmingham, on the other hand, parks represented the municipal gospel, and park authorities endorsed a greater (though less class-oriented) focus upon rational recreation in its parks. The park committee described Calthorpe Park as "an inexpressible

source of wholesome recreation and amusement ... detached from drinking customs and the evils so lamentably in connexion with the means of pleasure in the midst of our large Towns" in 1861.⁴⁸ The purchase of Aston Park in 1864 was justified as promoting "healthful exercise and rational recreation," and Joseph Chamberlain opened Highgate Park to provide "better opportunities for innocent enjoyment" than "the intemperate habits of some portion of their population ... their roughness of manners" in 1876.⁴⁹ Bath's RVPC hired bands to perform in Victoria Park in 1860, citing "the efforts of these Gentlemen to increase the rational amusements of the City."⁵⁰

Another Birmingham mayor, more concerned with general demeanor than with drinking, begged parkgoers to "exercise politeness one towards another; let them leave all roughness, and coarseness, and bad language outside the gates ... and perhaps afterwards the good conduct exercised there might spread to the streets also."⁵¹ This theme was echoed throughout park openings in Birmingham in the 1870s, though Bramwell concludes: "expectations that the parks would transform people's behaviour for the time subsequent to their visit when in other public spaces were generally over-ambitious."⁵² But while reformers offered only abstract hopes and prescriptions, parkgoers themselves frequently complained to park authorities when other parkgoers behaved

in ways they disapproved. Birmingham's Aston Park was taken over by the city in 1864 partly because of objections to its "pandering to the demands of a certain class of visitors for sensational and vulgar performances."⁵³ In 1889, complaints were received about Easter Monday visitors to the Lickey Hills "of a very rough class" who "behaved in a disorderly manner, breaking down hedges, trespassing on private grounds, unhooking gates, and assaulting those persons who endeavoured to protect their property."⁵⁴ Thus many parkgoers themselves supported reform campaigns at least indirectly.

Even traditional leisure activities such as holiday fairs no longer met with general public approval. Widespread complaints were received about the noisy, crowded fairs and other activities the LCC allowed at Hampstead Heath and other London open spaces on bank holidays, and the Home Counties Magazine praised a Kent bye-law against "holiday rowdyism" in 1901, arguing: "That recreation is sometimes the reverse of rational, few sensible people will deny; and when it ceases to be so, it becomes selfish and obnoxious."⁵⁵ One Londoner even formed a Parks Improvement Society in the 1900s

to have good Lectures, Debates, Singing, Hours with Poets, Humourists, and General Authors ... "poor work" will not be introduced. An overwhelming abundance of that is already provided in our parks by some of the greatest nuisances, male and female, whose "open-air" attempts should secure

them some "indoor reflection" to the relief of a long-suffering public.⁵⁶

The Birmingham park committee noted of a festival request in 1908: "it is very undesirable that side shows and swings should be allowed to be erected in the Parks," and sought to change the bye-laws.⁵⁷

In fact, while reformers' simplistic attempts to eliminate drinking and gambling were probably doomed to failure, there is no doubt that many working-class citizens themselves nurtured desires for "respectability" and social ambitions, and public parks, more than any other location, encouraged these to blossom. By the end of the nineteenth century, class divisions had blurred and park activities were less segregated. The growth in sports and in general park attendance, as well as improvements in workers' housing and pay, and a decline in alcohol consumption, all contributed to a growth in respectable, if not necessarily rational, park use.

Religion. Other reform campaigns had more specific goals. Religion produced two kinds of conflicts over park behavior. First, religious meetings held in parks could lead to protests from those of other persuasions. In one case in 1884, a Protestant evangelist made a series of anti-Catholic speeches in Regent's Park which provoked Irish parkgoers, and on June 15 "he was violently attacked by a number of Irish Romanists who surrounded him and pushed him

about in a fierce manner, and it was with the greatest difficulty he was rescued and got away by the Police and Park-keepers."⁵⁸ The Tribune painted a picture of more friendly religious competition in Hyde Park in 1906:

a little group of earnest Christians sings snatches of hymns with the charitable object of drowning the noise of the gentleman with the Yiddish accent who is denouncing Christianity. Incidentally, they drown also the noise of the hot gospeller in equal proximity, but that apparently matters not.⁵⁹

But more significant religious conflicts resulted from the Sabbatarian movement. Sabbatarians opposed activities such as band concerts, sports and boat rentals in public parks on Sundays, and some argued that parks should be closed altogether on that day. Sabbatarian organizations included the Society for Promoting the Observance of the Lord's-day, the Metropolitan Sunday Rest Association and the Working Men's Lord's Day Rest Association. Groups such as the Sunday Society and the National Sunday League, on the other hand, campaigned for more park amusements on Sundays as well as for Sunday opening of museums and libraries. Both sides claimed to promote more rational recreation, Sabbatarians threatening degeneracy from declining church attendance, while liberalizers stressed the value of parks and museums as "an inducement supplied to turn their backs upon the beershops, and to bring their families to see the things of interest in Nature or the things of beauty in

Art."⁶⁰ All parties in this dispute, therefore, saw public parks as an arena in which to raise public behavior to a higher level.

Debates over Sunday band concerts illustrate this campaign. Sunday bands first appeared in Kensington Gardens in 1855 with Queen Victoria's approval, playing immensely popular concerts of sacred music. In 1856, they expanded to Regent's and Victoria Parks, but after the Archbishop of Canterbury protested, the Prime Minister withdrew the concerts despite numerous public meetings and protests. In Birmingham, bye-laws adopted for the city's first park in 1857 prohibited both music and games on Sundays. The park's donor, Lord Calthorpe, had initially wanted the park to be closed altogether on Sundays. Such feelings were common enough for Anthony Trollope to poke fun at their hypocrisy by creating a character who

could almost worship a youthful marquis, though he lived a life that would disgrace a heathen among heathens; and ... condemn crowds of commonplace men and women to all eternal torments of which her imagination could conceive, because they listened to profane music in a park on Sunday.⁶¹

Around 1870, though, as parks became an integral element in city life and leisure, the tide began to turn against Sabbatarianism. A typical writer argued against "allowing a puritanical spirit in the few to domineer over the health, the happiness, and the morals of the many."⁶²

Bands sponsored by the National Sunday League soon began to appear in London parks "to supply cheerful and rational recreation," playing both secular and sacred music.⁶³ A desperate Sabbatarian tract warned workers against such concerts: "Perhaps some one reminds you, 'The Band is going to play in the Park this afternoon. ... Let us go and enjoy ourselves.' ... let your reply be, 'Not to-day.'"⁶⁴ Sunday League bands were instituted in London's Finsbury Park in 1880, and Victoria Park and Hampstead Heath in 1890. By 1891, the LCC had formed its own bands which continued to play for decades, interrupted only by World War I. The Birmingham park committee proposed Sunday concerts several times during the 1870s, but the idea was dropped in the face of public opposition. Sunday park concerts, initially only of sacred music, were first allowed in Birmingham in 1895, and continued thereafter.

In both cities, park authorities sympathized with Sunday liberalizers, aware that many parkgoers who worked all week and half of Saturday had few other opportunities to enjoy the parks, though they took care to float with the tide of public opinion. Sabbatarians ultimately succumbed to the pressures of secularism, more free time and the growing leisure industry. First band concerts (1880s), then boat rentals (1890s) and finally even team sports (1920s) achieved broad public acceptance as Sunday park activities

in London, with Birmingham usually a decade behind. The National Sunday League was wound up in 1902 with nothing left to protest, and by the 1930s virtually all Sunday park restrictions had been removed.

Sports, Women and Children. The movement for physical fitness envisioned public parks as an ideal location for new sports grounds in which to build healthier bodies and healthier minds for the public. Lord Brabazon thought sports would lead to "An increase in the mental powers" and "A decrease in crime, drunkenness, and immorality."⁶⁵ Few people opposed these goals, which stressed opportunity rather than limitation (as with Sabbatarians), although park authorities received occasional complaints from residents with windows broken by flying cricket balls. Conflict arose mainly because the demand to play sports increased faster than the supply of fields. Arguments thus tended to focus on the allocation of limited time and space rather than on larger issues of public behavior, for example which sports should be allowed, where and when; what, if any, charges should be levied; and whether schoolchildren, athletic clubs or the military should be given priority to use sports grounds.

A more significant branch of this conflict concerned women's sports privileges in parks, because this issue dealt with changing boundaries for public behavior. During the

nineteenth century, swimming lakes in parks excluded women most or all of the time. In Birmingham, a swimming pool which opened in Small Heath Park in 1883 was reserved for women one day a week. In London, only in 1902 could women use a bathing pond at Hampstead Heath one day a week, and this concession led to complaints from male bathers. When the weather turned cold and female attendance declined, the pond was given back to the men for the winter. Bowling greens, baseball and hockey for girls were added the same year, but complaints surfaced in 1909, when men and boys obstructed women's hockey games at Hampstead Heath. London's most central park swimming spot, the Serpentine in Hyde Park, opened to girls under 14 only in 1911.

Bicycling, on the other hand, became a popular park sport and spectacle in London in the 1890s, combining the novelty of cycles with the novelty of participation by women. One woman recalled cycling "in the dusk round Regent's Park, stared at and jeered at by the little boys, who found great fun in a woman's first futile attempt to mount."⁶⁶ Battersea Park, a South London park not normally frequented by the upper and middle classes, became the premier cycling arena for women. One writer suggested: "perhaps the daring originality of cycling seemed to demand that conventions should further be violated; and nothing so commonplace as Hyde Park would satisfy the aspirations of

the newly-emancipated lady cyclists."⁶⁷ Shorter skirts were introduced for women cyclists, which also attracted much attention in the parks. Women built upon their demonstration of athletic abilities in cycling to demand more privileges in swimming pools. When cycling, young ladies no longer required chaperones to visit the parks. As one writer commented sourly in 1897: "The bicycle is responsible for much promiscuous acquaintanceship."⁶⁸ In Birmingham and Bath, however, bicycling in parks remained very restricted until the twentieth century.

The constant need for more grounds for team sports continued to influence press discussions of parks in the years following World War I, often focused specifically on women. In Bath, tennis courts were added to parks in 1914, available to all at a small charge, and when a ladies' club offered to purchase 20 season tennis tickets in exchange for an exclusive court in Alexandra Park in 1919, the offer was accepted. The Birmingham Post commented on the lack of women's fields in parks there in 1919: "So far as the municipality is concerned, there are no such facilities. There is a growing inclination among girls, especially since their entry during the war into many of men's avocations, to indulge in games like hockey, cricket, and net ball."⁶⁹ Far more sports facilities were built for men than for women, but women derived a definite benefit from the sports

movement in parks by achieving a more visible role in public culture.

Schoolchildren were another target of sports advocates, and increasing park use focused more attention on services for children and on the possibilities of "improving" their minds and bodies while still young. The expanding definition of the public, already taking in workers and women, now broadened to consider the particular needs of children. Brabazon thought "The provision of playgrounds for poor children" to be "one of the many steps which it will be necessary to take if we wish to raise the standard of national health" in 1885.⁷⁰

Birmingham pioneered park sports facilities for children. Its first children's playground opened in 1877, more were added as the years went on, and in 1900, after an investigation of playgrounds in London, Glasgow and Manchester, the park committee erected gymnasia for children to play on in two parks. Very quickly the gyms became "so attractive to the Scholars that it requires the services of four Inspectors to be in attendance to prevent the children using the Gymnasium instead of being at School," complained the School Board.⁷¹ Under pressure from the Birmingham Playgrounds, Open Spaces, and Playing Fields Association, more playgrounds and gymnasia were added in the following years.

In 1910, Birmingham took a new step toward encouraging children's sports in its public parks, and gave permission to a voluntary society to organize evening games in certain parks for three to four hundred boys and girls at a time. Afterwards, the committee reported that the program had resulted in "better and more extended and intelligent use of the Parks and Recreation Grounds, especially by the poorer children."⁷² One supervisor reported: "At the end of the session the children were cleaner ... they were more reliable, they played fairer," while another found "Each night brought improvement in the children's behaviour towards each other, respect for the helpers, and also for apparatus."⁷³ Thereafter the city ran the program itself, trying to "inculcate habits of self-discipline, good temper and right conduct, which make for true manliness and worthy citizenship in future years," and the games continued through World War I with the help of private donations.⁷⁴ Despite protests about "great nuisance and inconvenience" in the city's park playgrounds in 1914 and 1916, the committee refused to remove popular equipment.⁷⁵

Organized children's sports came into their own in London somewhat later. The LCC constructed gymnasias and playgrounds for children beginning in the 1890s, and the OW opened a popular children's playground in Kensington Gardens in 1909. In 1907, when the LCC made physical exercise a

required part of its school curriculum, the OW agreed to provide fields for schoolchildren in Regent's Park and later Greenwich Park, but sports were still banned entirely in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. The Bailiff argued: "other children could not be prohibited from playing also. I am afraid we should get much of the Park denuded of grass -- and the public would be inconvenienced."⁷⁶ However, the First Commissioner from 1911 to 1914, Lord Beauchamp, was a strong supporter of sports, and during his tenure sports facilities were generally expanded in the royal parks.

Children's playgrounds emerged in Bath about the same time as in London. In 1891 the park committee selected sites for playgrounds and cricket and football fields in four districts of the city, though plans to install playground equipment were initially postponed for economic reasons and because "it is unnecessary to provide such elaborate appliances as are required for smaller playgrounds in the heart of a town."⁷⁷ As more playgrounds opened in the 1890s, swings were gradually added. At the same time, plans for one playground were withdrawn in 1896 after nearby residents objected, and at another railings protecting adjoining property had to be reinforced several times, and equipment was sometimes shifted around after complaints of noise.

Sexual Decency. As respectable parkgoers of different social classes, religious practices, genders and ages grew closer together, objectionable park behavior was increasingly associated with deviance from society as a whole, rather than with a particular subset of that society. Like the verminous persons excluded from public parks, "immoral" ones faced attacks by the public and the press in the late nineteenth century, with frequent complaints made to park authorities. Immorality in public parks, as vaguely defined as the public itself, could embrace activities ranging from the fairly innocent, like boys swimming naked in the lakes or young couples holding hands, to legal crimes such as prostitution and sexual attacks on children.

Swimming gave rise to objections in London parks partly because of crowding and noise but mainly because, since bathing suits were not in common use, naked male bodies were frequently visible on the paths by the Serpentine in Hyde Park where swimming took place in the mornings and evenings. In 1874, the Daily Telegraph represented nudity as a de facto exclusion of women from the park: "Many of our correspondents complain -- and not without reason -- that after eight it is absolutely impossible for ladies to traverse Rotten-row or even approach the Serpentine."⁷⁸ The OW took no action, but elsewhere, and even in London's municipal parks, a more conservative mentality developed. Bathers

over 16 were required to wear bathing suits in Birmingham parks beginning in 1873. When complaints were made about indecency at the Hampstead Heath swimming pond in 1877, the MBW hired attendants to supervise the bathing. The LCC required bathing suits for boys over 12 at its Victoria Park lake beginning in 1889, and by 1897 at all LCC bathing lakes. There was no park swimming in Bath, since its mineral springs were the town's major attraction.

The OW's continued apathy inspired criticism by Londoners deprecating the moral effects of open bathing. E.R. Bladwell complained in 1907 that "such a scene of nudity cannot but have a demoralizing effect" on women, while for men, it was "not fair or pleasant for the bathers to be subjected to such unnecessary publicity, for no self-respecting person could bathe there."⁷⁹ He wrote to the LCC, the OW and even the House of Commons frequently over the next few years, but the OW agreed to make changes only in 1911 when it was found that, despite the prohibition, young girls were jumping into the Serpentine along with the boys. The OW Secretary now cited the risks of "an outcry on the score of morality" as well as "the grave risk of scandal," and a supervised enclosure was constructed for girls under 14.⁸⁰ Men and boys continued to bathe openly, however, and once the danger to young girls had gone, the OW's impetus to implement moral reform evaporated. The

Secretary noted in 1914: "I view these [continued] complaints as rank prudery ... There are certain people who wish to see all statues in the nude, draped."⁸¹

Other reformers focused on indecent behavior. Many wanted even respectable young couples expelled from public parks. Hyde Park, Hampstead Heath and Clapham Common were the most frequently cited areas in London. A wide range of views was held on this issue, as traditional reserve clashed with more modern morals. Park authorities were caught in a dilemma, unable to enforce absolute purity in the parks, yet equally unwilling to be seen condoning indecency and disorder. The police and Home Office also got involved because indecency, unlike other objectionable park activities, could be prosecuted. Actual sexual crimes in parks created less controversy, for the law there was clear and the issue simply one of enforcement. The very vagueness of "immorality" and "indecency," though, led to friction and changes in definitions of appropriate public behavior.

Most park authorities passed bye-laws prohibiting indecent behavior in public parks. In London, an 1871 case of prostitution in Finsbury Park led the MBW's solicitor to assure them that "whatever openly outrages decency and is injurious to public morals, is a misdemeanour at Common law," and a new bye-law was passed accordingly.⁸² 1892 LCC bye-laws specifically prohibited "lying on any of the seats,

or lying, sleeping, sitting, or resting in an indecent posture, or being disorderly or wilfully or designedly doing any act which outrages public decency."⁸³ Birmingham's 1873 park bye-laws prohibited "Profane, indecent, offensive, or insulting language or behaviour."⁸⁴ In Bath, "indecent or obscene language" was prohibited in park bye-laws beginning in 1898.⁸⁵

However, the failure of these bye-laws to specify the exact nature of prohibited behavior, and obvious difficulties of enforcement in large, unlighted parks made complaints almost inevitable. In 1886, the Clapham Vigilance Association protested to the Home Office about prostitutes on Clapham Common tempting "mere boys," and complained: "no lady or honest woman can venture upon the Common."⁸⁶ A police investigation, however, instead identified "a great number of well dressed, 'courting couples,' (apparently respectable), who roam about the Common after dark ... frequently to be seen sitting on the seats caressing each other."⁸⁷ No changes were made in policy at the Common, but disagreements about whether intimate encounters in parks represented prostitution or innocuous courting continued.

Complaints began to intensify around the turn of the century, just when verminous persons were also being identified as undesirable. Definitions of the public now reflected consciousness of intentional deviant behavior

rather than social or economic background, and the categories of "immoral" and "verminous" overlapped to a certain extent. A newspaper article in 1906 complaining about tramps sleeping in Hyde Park at night was refuted by the OW, which claimed that "the worst offenders" were not tramps, but "young couples who lie about in an indiscreet and shameless way."⁸⁸ The London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality, led by the Bishop of London, filed a complaint in 1913 about Hyde Park, citing evidence of "numbers of young girls who have lost their chastity in the Park," and arguing "There is a strong public opinion that acts of immorality should be made impossible in our public parks which are not closed at dusk and that opinion is rapidly growing."⁸⁹ As with complaints about naked swimming, the OW hesitated to act, but agreed to close some of the Hyde Park women's lavatories which were used at night by prostitutes. The earliest complaints about "questionable conduct" in Birmingham parks occurred around the same time, in 1904, and again in 1912.⁹⁰

The fundamental disagreement in complaints about decency was how to deal with the respectable young people generally referred to as "courting couples," whose behavior tended to shock older parkgoers. The Mayor of Hampstead complained of "this shocking state of affairs" in which "couples are allowed to lie promiscuously all over the

Heath, generally in each other's arms, when propinquity leads to more serious offences."⁹¹ Groups like the Morality Council also found them objectionable. A park "observer" complained in 1918 that "twenty or thirty years ago the limit of alfresco courtship recognised by ordinary folks extended as far as placing an arm round a lady's waist, whilst sitting on a seat. Now the seats ... are discarded in favour of lying full length on the grass."⁹² Park authorities, on the other hand, generally held the opposite view. The police pointed out in 1906: "the arrest of respectable people on such a charge [indecentcy] would prove embarrassing. There is not necessarily harm in young couples lying on the grass."⁹³ Ten years later, the Police Commissioner noted that "any special activity in bringing more transgressors before the Court may have very disastrous results -- for if a girl is branded by the finding of a Court as immoral she may be driven to prostitution."⁹⁴

Women in Birmingham petitioned to be allowed to patrol the parks to protect children from immoral acts in 1915, but the park committee refused, and no concern about special park supervision to control indecency was shown until 1918. However, the volume of complaints in London prompted the police to try a new tactic in Hyde Park in 1917 of first "warning such couples that their action was disgraceful," then (on a second offense) officially cautioning them at the

police station, and finally (on a third offense) prosecuting them.⁹⁵ Warning notices were also posted at the park gates. The Secretary bragged shortly afterwards: "We now get daily convictions for men lying either on top of a girl or with leg across the girl without any exposure of person."⁹⁶ Special constables and women patrols were used for this work. The police noted in their own defense that "individuals of good social standing" were arrested as well as others, so that they could not be accused of making class distinctions.⁹⁷

Again, though, complaints could not be completely eliminated, for as the police pointed out: "in many cases the conduct of couples, though appearing to clean minded persons as indecent, would not constitute an offence against the Park Regulations."⁹⁸ This state of affairs lasted until 1922, when a court case ruled that convictions for indecency could not be based on police evidence alone, but required evidence from a member of the public who had been annoyed. The decision was extremely popular, and was supported by a press campaign against unjust accusations. As convictions for indecency rapidly declined with the unwillingness of parkgoers to testify in court, morality activists held a final conference with the OW and Home Office in 1923. To Morality Council complaints, the Police Commissioner replied pointedly: "He regretted that the

Council for the Promotion of Public Morality had done nothing at that time [of the 1922 trial] to support the police," and the meeting concluded.⁹⁹ Looser morals had triumphed in the park.

Politicizing the Public

Defining the public and debating the extent to which its behavior in public parks could or should be reformed both aroused controversy. However, the most violent conflicts over behavior in public parks involved politics. The right of assembly for public meetings in parks was itself a political debate in addition to the political content of such meetings. In fact, the development of a broader urban political culture required the space of parks, since no practical alternative existed for large political meetings. Once the right to hold public meetings in parks had been established in London, parks became essential political spaces in the city, where new political causes including socialism, suffragism and pacifism found a large, diverse and often hostile audience. Donald Richter has explored the history of these meetings, arguing that while the Home Office engaged in a certain amount of repression, its record in regard to public meetings was "a triumph of Victorian bureaucracy" in the circumstances.¹⁰⁰ He traces the history of mob violence in Britain through to its

institutionalization in public park meetings, and concludes that Victorian society managed to preserve both freedom of speech and public order through the use of public parks.

Right of Assembly. In London, no legal right to hold public meetings in royal parks existed before 1872, or in the municipal parks before 1883. However, parkgoers defended what they considered to be their rights as members of the public and therefore "owners" of the parks by holding illegal meetings anyway, some of which developed into riots. The most momentous of these occurred in July 1866. The second Reform Bill extending the franchise seemed near to victory. The Reform League had sponsored several public meetings to demonstrate support, and planned a large one in Hyde Park since "It is, as much as any other, maintained by the taxation of the unenfranchised labourer. And there seemed a special appropriateness in bringing the great demonstration to the very doors and into the very midst of that 'upper class'."¹⁰¹

A police proclamation forbade the meeting, but Edmond Beales, leader of Reform League, countered:

The Park is either the property of the nation ... or it is still Crown property, though kept up and maintained out of the public purse. If the former be the fact, where is your authority for excluding the people from their own property? If the latter be the case, then show me that you are acting under the express authority of the Crown.¹⁰²

On the day of the meeting, about fifty thousand people assembled but were blocked from entering the park by police. Very quickly, "The railings at Park-lane were broken in and in a few minutes several thousands had entered the park," with many injuries on both sides.¹⁰³ Military reinforcements arrived, but Hyde Park did not settle down until midnight, and protests continued the next day. A temporary compromise was then reached in which the Reform League agreed to preserve the peace for a few days if the police agreed not to enter the park. The riot naturally attracted press coverage, and broadsides also appeared in the streets. One rhyme in support of the demonstrators ran:

And why should the parks be ever closed
Against the poor, who for them pay ...
If the public parks of London
Are only for one class,
They ought to put this notice up:--
The poor they cannot pass.
It's time our laws they altered were.¹⁰⁴

Following this riot, and anticipating more in the future, the OW consulted the Law Officers about their legal right to disperse prohibited public meetings in the royal parks by force. The Law Officers reaffirmed an 1855 ruling outlining the OW's legal right to remove individuals from royal parks, assuming that warning had been given, but they cautioned that a group meeting presented a different scenario: "there is not for any practical purpose a legal authority to disperse by force a meeting of the kind supposed con-

sisting of a large number of persons," an opinion which held sway into the twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ Without this legal right, park authorities hesitated to provoke violence by an outright ban on meetings. Instead, police and troops were kept in reserve at future (still technically illegal) meetings, but instructed not to interfere unless absolutely necessary.

Franchise reform came in 1867, and the quest for the legal right of public assembly in the parks developed renewed vigor. In April 1867, a Working Men's Rights Association marched into Hyde Park "to protest against the park being closed to them, as they contended they had a perfect right to be there."¹⁰⁶ Another planned meeting in Hyde Park in May 1867 inspired 16,000 people to sign a petition against the meeting, and special constables were sworn in to help maintain order. This meeting was in fact banned, but at the last minute "the futility of guarding the railings and hoardings of the whole Park was so forcible that it was determined not to keep anybody out" and the meeting took place.¹⁰⁷ More than a hundred thousand people showed up, and broadsides appeared in the streets celebrating the success of the demonstration:

In Hyde Park, on the 6th, it was right against
might,
With Beales for our leader, we beat them that
night ...
Our rights! it is all that we ask,
To meet with each other when labour is done,

And speak out our minds in the Park.¹⁰⁸

The OW now made its first attempt to get new legislation prohibiting public meetings in the royal parks, but the bill failed in the face of much public opposition. At one rally in August 1867, 300 people cheered a speaker who asked them:

What would be the use of the franchise if you are denied the use of the parks for public speaking? The parks are the only places in the Metropolis where demonstrations of any kind can be held; and their electoral power was of little use to them if they could not meet and ventilate their political opinions.¹⁰⁹

A new version of the bill giving the OW power to regulate the parks only for certain specific offenses, which did not include public meetings, was introduced to Parliament in 1871. The First Commissioner now felt compelled to "guard against any misconstruction of motives, and to prevent the political question again arising."¹¹⁰ The Parks Regulation Act finally passed in 1872, and remained the basis for royal park bye-laws until 1926. Rules were drawn up for each park individually. In Hyde Park, the most commonly used for previous political meetings, public meetings were permitted, but regulations restricted them to a certain site, required advance written notice and banned "unlawful" speeches. Similar regulations were enacted for other parks, though not all royal parks contained official meeting sites. Political meetings thereafter found legal protection and more sym-
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thetic administration. As the OW Secretary noted when refusing a request for a religious procession in Hyde Park in 1911: "It is true that we allow political demonstrations; but political people have no places to hold their meetings whereas all religious bodies have churches."¹¹¹

In London's municipal parks, the right to public meetings took longer to establish than in the royal parks. The MBW's 1870 bye-laws forbade "any meeting within the Park for discussion of any subject political, religious or otherwise."¹¹² When new bye-laws were written for Hampstead Heath in 1878, this provision was amended so that addresses could be delivered with written permission, but they were still forbidden in the more central Finsbury and Southwark Parks. In 1883, the Rotherhithe Ratepayers Association held a political meeting in Southwark Park to challenge "the action of the Metropolitan Board of Works in refusing to acknowledge the right of public meeting in the parks and open spaces under their control."¹¹³ The MBW issued summons against the speakers, who then petitioned the Home Office for support.

Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, was sympathetic to the protesters. He advised the MBW:

it would be intolerable if the population of London amounting to 4 Millions of people were destitute of such opportunities which are naturally and legitimately desired.

Both Parliament and the Crown have in the administration of the Parks under their Control

evidenced their opinion that public Meetings conducted in a peaceable & orderly manner constitute a proper and even useful employment of open spaces in the Metropolis.¹¹⁴

The MBW took the case to trial, however, where the prosecutor argued: "The meetings of these voluble public orators was an absolute nuisance, and was as great a devotion of public property to private interest as could be."¹¹⁵ The defense claimed in turn that the park "was bought by the public, and if the public had paid for it they had a right to use it."¹¹⁶ After lengthy recriminations on all sides, the MBW agreed in December 1883 to create designated meeting sites in some of its parks without requiring written permission. Sites in Southwark Park and Hampstead Heath were opened in 1884, and in Finsbury Park in 1889.

Birmingham and Bath present a sharp contrast to London in political park use. Though known for political radicalism and riots, especially in the mid-nineteenth century, Birmingham's parks were off-limits to public meetings. The 1873 park bye-laws specifically stated: "No preaching, lecture, or public discussion on any subject, and no meeting for the purpose of making any political or religious demonstration ... shall be allowed in the Parks."¹¹⁷ In 1906 the park committee allowed a series of science lectures in Lightwoods Park only on the condition that "the Meetings will be held for Educational and Scientific purposes only and not for Political or Religious addresses."¹¹⁸

Public political meetings in Birmingham predated parks. They were traditionally held in the "Bull Ring," a central square, and so did not develop the association with public parks that meetings did in London. One native recalled going around the turn of the century to "the Bull Ring to enjoy the oratorical fervour of agitators holding forth ... to those who had ears to hear and minds to learn this provincial Hyde Park Corner could be the university of aspiring youth."¹¹⁹ Some meetings were allowed under the guise of festivals. In 1883, for example, the Liberal Association was allowed to use Highgate Park for "the formation of processions for the John Bright celebrations," and a procession of the League of Frontiersmen could meet there in 1907. Proposed labor demonstrations were refused three times, however.¹²⁰ By 1914, a more tolerant policy seemed to be forming, for when the United Brotherhood petitioned to hold a demonstration in Sparkhill Park, they were simultaneously refused official permission and informed that the park committee "would have no objection to your assembling in the Park."¹²¹

In Bath, the Hedgemoor Park bye-laws prohibited public addresses unless "authorized," but meetings were not specifically mentioned until 1914, when the Trades and Labour Council and Liberal Association both received permission to hold meetings in Sydney Gardens (which however were can-

celled by the organizations themselves on the outbreak of war). As in Birmingham, no strong association developed between public parks and public meetings.

Park Political Culture. By the end of the nineteenth century, political meetings in London parks had been institutionalized and no longer threatened wealthier Londoners, who, when not involved in such meetings themselves, now looked upon them with amused resignation. One writer noted in 1896: "The effect of licensing meetings in Hyde Park has been to turn that place into a bear-garden on most Sundays during fine weather, and one-sided meetings, more or less orderly, have been held on almost every subject, social and political."¹²² Another noted that the park "has become the recognised place in which to air popular discontent in any form, or to ventilate any grievance."¹²³ Others acted as though conflict over the right to assembly had barely happened. Fifty years afterward, a historian of Hyde Park referred to the riot of 1866 as "an accident, and almost a joke" due to "the rotten state of the old railing," and added "Promiscuous men and women speakers in the Park are generally cranks, who do no good to the cause they advocate."¹²⁴

Yet places such as Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park had become important new political spaces, and other commentators had stronger opinions on public meetings. The Il-

Illustrated London News argued in defense of controversial addresses: "The essence of free speech is that it must be maintained even when it is abused."¹²⁵ Real opposition still existed in conservative sectors, as one man showed: "The demagogues who call boisterous meetings in Hyde Park ... imperilling life and limb to women and children; mutilating noble trees; and empoisoning fresh air, are offending against known law."¹²⁶ Hyde Park was not the only site for meetings; a chronicler of the parks noted of the East End: "Victoria Park gathers just such assemblies, and every park could make more or less the same boast."¹²⁷ Finsbury Park in north London also held its share. One child who grew up nearby recalled how "the big field adjoining the railway was totally bald, worn to the buff by the boots of Edwardian artisans as the local Speakers' Corner, at weekends taken over by protest meetings. I remember once asking my father what all the meetings were protesting about and he said 'each other.'"¹²⁸

Political meetings in parks reached such high numbers that the police went on strike in 1890 partly in response to the constant Sunday duty required of them to monitor meetings. One Hyde Park policeman recalled "orators -- or rather would-be orators -- of all classes venting their preconceived notions, grievances, etc."¹²⁹ In 1908, new police observation boxes were added at the meeting ground in

Hyde Park, and by 1913, public meetings were "of daily and nightly occurrence, considerably adding to the duties of the Police."¹³⁰

Once the principle of public meetings in London parks had been accepted and they began occurring in large numbers, subsidiary conflicts arose between those holding meetings and park authorities. One occurred over whether literature could be distributed by organizations in the parks. Both the OW and the LCC tried to suppress the practice, with dubious legality and limited success. Solicitation for money, a second practice associated with meetings, often sparked complaints but again park authorities had difficulty instituting legal and effective bans. A third form of conflict occurred when groups held meetings either away from the designated sites in the parks, or in parks without designated meeting spaces. New and controversial trends in public meeting styles included the use of large processions to gain attention, and of vans driven into the park as elevated speaking platforms.

Other types of meeting conflicts occurred between different groups of parkgoers, often when citizens felt overwhelmed by the number of meetings in their parks. By 1908, the press of meetings at Marble Arch in Hyde Park was so great that the OW tried unsuccessfully to create a new meeting ground which would be less crowded. Local resis-

tance also occurred in 1909 in Hampstead when public speakers rejected the assigned LCC meeting site on the Heath and assembled instead in the road where a better audience was assured. Groups meeting on one Sunday in June, for example, included the Independent Labour Party, Social Democratic Federation, Anti-Socialist League, Women's Suffrage Society, Christian Evidence League, Church of England Catholic Crusaders, League of Progressive Thought and Social Service and National Secular Society. Complaints about noise and crowds were made to the Home Office and to the Hampstead Borough Council, and letters were also published in the local Hampstead and Highgate Express. One resident wrote:

The pleasure of walking on our beautiful Heath on Sundays is painfully neutralized by what goes on there. What with gatherings of 'Socialists,' 'Reformers,' hysterical women, and such like, causing crowds (drawn from apparently all parts) to assemble the place is fast becoming, if it has not already become, a perfect pandemonium and a source of considerable annoyance to the inhabitants.¹³¹

The Home Office pressed the LCC to provide a more convenient site on the Heath to lure the speakers away from the road, but both meetings in the roadway and complaints from residents continued.

Suffragettes were probably more controversial than any other group meeting in the parks, and their early twentieth-century gatherings led to numerous violent disturbances.

One woman commented in 1908: "The evolution of the twentieth-century girl began with the 'bike' at the end of the previous decade, and is now taking root in the suffragette."¹³² In a typical incident at a meeting in Hyde Park in 1913, the police reported:

showers of turf and clods ... were being thrown from every part of the audience. ...

Several ugly rushes were made to get at the ladies, but they were safely escorted inside the [police] Station where they received attention from the matron: as all were covered with earth

... at least 95 per cent of the audience were determined to put a stop to the preaching of militant ladies.¹³³

Afterward, the Commissioner of Police wrote the major suffragettes' organization that the combination of "disorder" and "the fact that it is the avowed policy of the Women's Social and Political Union to advocate the commission of crimes" threatened future park meetings.¹³⁴ Unwilling to declare an outright ban, which might be difficult to enforce, he pressed the OW to ban the use of vans as platforms and thereby indirectly prevent the suffragettes from being heard. The OW reluctantly refused permission for suffragette vans, and the First Commissioner complained: "the Police wish to throw upon this office the responsibility & blame for refusal ... we must see that the credit or blame for such action is thrown upon the responsible authority & not upon us."¹³⁵ A week later the Police Commissioner changed his mind, and thereafter allowed all

suffrage organizations (except two which specifically advocated crimes) to use vans in meetings.

The next prohibitions of public meetings occurred during World War I, when the Defence of the Realm Act gave the government wide-ranging powers, including the power to ban public meetings in parks. This power was little used, but in May 1918 a planned pacifist Labour demonstration in Finsbury Park was prohibited. Though a number of demonstrators showed up in the park with red flags, disorder was averted by closing the park when counter-demonstrators arrived. Public meeting rights had become firmly enough established to resist attempts to continue repression after the war ended.

In 1919, the Commissioner of Police suggested that public meetings in the parks should be banned after dark, when "the assertion of continual control becomes particularly difficult," and the OW Bailiff was immediately sympathetic: "I am in entire accord with anything which can be done to mitigate the nuisance caused by them. The doctrines which are aired at these meetings are often of such a nature as to make most people wonder that they are tolerated."¹³⁶ The Secretary and First Commissioner reluctantly agreed, and the issue was presented to the War Cabinet for a new rule with the caution that "such action may be severely criticised and considerable opposition may be experienced. ...

the right of public meetings in Hyde Park has been exercised for a very long period of time."¹³⁷ In the circumstances, the Cabinet declined to make any change. A park use which had been so controversial fifty years before had now become sacred.

Conclusion

As public parks gained greater importance in city life after 1870, parkgoers struggled to define the boundaries of the public, to agree on policies for shaping park behavior, and to establish parks as political spaces. The balance of power between governments, private groups and public park users shifted continually, and dissent within these groups also delayed agreement over these issues. But by the early twentieth century, conflict in public parks occurred within a more consensual framework.

Most parkgoers now agreed on more open admission standards. Redefinitions of the public excluding the verminous and the immoral, rather than the respectable poor, united parkgoers more effectively than class discrimination. New sports activities in parks for women and children made gender and age less important as public boundaries, while the decline in Sabbatarianism minimized religious differences in parks. Citizens also coincided on the necessity for bye-laws to shape park behavior. Politics remained the

most controversial form of park use, but the violent demonstrations of the 1860s and early 1870s gave way to institutionalized public meeting habits for a large park-going public which agreed on the right to political discussion within parks.

A 1908 chronicler of Hyde Park concluded: "It is the most truly democratic spot in all London. It is surprising what tolerance there is, what good feeling pervades the throng made up of such extraordinary mixtures and contradictions."¹³⁸ While parkgoers and park managers had struggled over the use and meaning of public parks, they themselves had been transformed by their interactions within in public space. Everyday visits to parks for social purposes, discussed in the next chapter, clearly illustrated this change. Park ceremonies, imperial institutions and World War I then introduced new ideas about citizenship and national identity which completed the evolution of a new urban public culture in Britain.

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CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL DISPLAY IN PUBLIC PARKS

Introduction

During the second half of the nineteenth century, as the conflicts described in the last chapter played out, public parks acquired a greater role in the daily life of urban residents, one reflected in new and more permanent forms of written discourse. Parks had been visible in the press for some time. Newspapers noted park openings and events, park activists lobbied for new and better parks, and ordinary citizens contributed letters to editors about controversial park uses. But beyond these brief mentions, parks increasingly also appeared as central elements in city life in less ephemeral works of various types, including etiquette books, novels and travel guides.

Etiquette manuals, signals of unstable class lines and increased social mobility, included new sections on behavior and dress suitable for appearances in public parks.¹ Parks also played a role in contemporary fiction, especially realistic novels, as authors set both dramatic scenes and routines of daily life in parks.² Travel guides to London, Bath and Birmingham highlighted each city's parks as attractions for visitors and introduced tourists to park activities. The number of urban public parks had begun to reach a critical mass by 1870, so that while park creation

continued, park use now predominated as a subject in written discourse. Public parks were thus institutionalized in books, and this chapter will discuss aspects of park use portrayed in contemporary literature and their implications for public life. First, parks offered ideal locations for private (yet public) purposes of lovers' meetings, family outings and natural refuges from the city. But more importantly, these central public spaces encouraged public social displays and rituals of class and gender identity. Finally, they also served as arenas for the viewing of such rituals by resident spectators and tourists, who themselves played a crucial part in such public interactions.

While class identities remained strong in the late nineteenth century, the importance of class status in determining participation in public life waned, especially in leisure environments, as described in the last chapter. Parkgoers of different social classes met fairly amicably in public parks, yet parks now became key locations for the assertion of remaining social differences. Urban residents used public space to mark out subtle boundaries through spatial segregation and intricate codes of dress, language and behavior. Social status now depended not on exclusion, but on affirmation of identity through interactions with a broad cross-section of the public, in public space. As park

use expanded with the growth of tourism, visiting spectators reinforced the publicity of social integration in parks.

This chapter will explore both private and public uses of parks for social purposes. While London, Bath and Birmingham will all be considered, London occupied by far the predominant position in this discourse, particularly in novels and etiquette guides. Within London, two parks were mentioned especially frequently: Hyde Park, the central royal park dear to fashionable society, and Hampstead Heath, the open space noted for attracting local artists as well as working-class visitors.

Publicizing Private Life

Not all park visits were made for purposes of participating in public social rituals. City-dwellers also had more private uses for public parks, including lovers' meetings, family outings with children, and solitary retreats from urban stress. Certainly a common use for parks in reality as well as in novels was as lovers' trysting places, providing a respectable public place for young couples to evade supervision. Most novels had a degree of "love interest," and love scenes for citizens of all classes frequently occurred in parks. In John Galsworthy's The Man of Property, upper middle-class Soames Forsyte exacerbates his strained relationship with his wife

by forcing her to sit in Hyde Park with him one afternoon while he tries to relive their previous meetings there: "one of the past delights of the first two seasons of his married life, when to feel himself the possessor of this gracious creature before all London had been his greatest, though secret, pride."³ In George Gissing's New Grub Street, the tormented writer Biffen finds inspiration in working-class park love scenes:

As I came along by Regent's Park half an hour ago a man and a girl were walking close by in front of me, love-making; I passed them slowly and heard a good deal of their talk -- it was part of the situation that they should pay no heed to a stranger's proximity. ... I am going to reproduce it verbatim.⁴

Note the key role of public display in both these "private" love scenes.

Lovers' meetings in parks could in fact never be entirely private, and discoveries could lead to scandal. Irene and her illicit lover Bosinney were twice caught by relatives together in London parks in Galsworthy's The Man of Property. Yet parks often offered the only alternative to couples wanting any degree of privacy. Meath recalled courting his wife in Hyde Park in 1867. Since "In those days a girl in Society never left her London home unchaperoned," he could only meet her on a bench in Kensington Gardens, where "My proposal was made under great difficulties, as she was placed between her father and mother, and

I was next to her father, and had to carry on a conversation with him, and at the same time communicate with his daughter."⁵ Years later, Galsworthy portrayed Hyde Park as a refuge for more modern lovers:

Couple after couple, from every gate, they streamed along the paths and over the burnt grass, and one after another, silently out of the lighted spaces, stole into the shelter of the feathery trees, where, blotted against some trunk, or under the shadow of shrubs, they were lost to all but themselves.⁶

A second common "private" park use was for family outings. Children of all classes went to the parks: upper class children accompanied by their nurses, middle-class ones with parents, working-class ones often alone or with their families on Sundays. Novels frequently pictured children's park use. In William Thackeray's Vanity Fair, Rawdon Crawley takes his son for "their accustomed walk in the park," and encounters old Sedley with little Georgy also en route "to the neighbouring parks or Kensington Gardens, to see the soldiers or to feed the ducks;" after young Rawdon is sent away to school, his father "missed him sadly of mornings and tried in vain to walk in the park without him."⁷ In Anthony Trollope's The Three Clerks (1857), Uncle Bat, described as "a bit of a democrat," "insisted on seeing the chestnuts and the crowd" in Bushy Park on a Sunday, though his family was less pleased by the sight of picnicking London workers.⁸ A sarcastic "Belief and Command-

ments on the Rights of Women" pictured a working-class wife commanding her husband on Sunday, his only holiday: "you may scrub the floor, peel the potatoes, make the dumplings, and cook the dinner. In the afternoon, by way of amusement, you must take the children to the park and show the little darlings the ducks."⁹ Clearly, park visits became an important part of life for all types of city children.

In addition to direct portrayals of children in the parks, novels featured adults recalling park visits with their children. In Galsworthy's The Man of Property, the patriarch of the family, old Jolyon Forsyte, nostalgically remembers park outings with his children and grandchildren:

those Sunday afternoons on Hampstead Heath, when young Jolyon and he went for a stretch along the Spaniard's Road to Highgate, to Child's Hill, and back over the Heath again to dine at Jack Straw's Castle -- how delicious his cigars were then! ...

When June was a toddler of five, and every other Sunday he took her to the Zoo, away from the society of those two good women, her mother and her grandmother, and at the top of the bearden baited his umbrella with buns for her favorite bears, how sweet his cigars were then!¹⁰

Even literature written specifically for children underlined the role of parks in urban children's lives. In 1855, a story called The Children's Visit to the Waterfowl in St. James's Park noted that "the most delightful places about the Great City are the Parks ... Besides being healthy, a visit to the parks is instructive, and pleasing."¹¹ The tale describes five young (presumably working-

class) children who set off alone on a three-mile walk to St. James's Park, where they picnic, feed the birds, play games, drink milk fresh from a cow, see the Queen drive by, and eventually go home by boat. A 1901 children's guide to London featured a visit to "the jewel-like flower beds of Regent's Park" and the zoo to watch the lions being fed and ride on the camel.¹²

Memoirs of city childhood park use reinforce the pictures painted by children's literature. While experiences clearly varied for children of different social backgrounds, all seem to have felt a new freedom while in parks. Middle-class Anne Arnott, growing up in Bath in the early twentieth century, remembered how every afternoon "pushchairs ... followed by clusters of older children on scooters or 'fairy' bicycles, or perhaps with wooden hoops ... converged on the Victoria Park," where "the children, free for a brief time, raced up and down the footpaths and played elaborate games among the trees and shrubs."¹³ Lower middle-class C.H. Rolph grew up in Edwardian London, living first near Finsbury Park, where he learned to fly kites, and then near Bishop's Park, where he sailed model yachts and attended Sunday school picnics.¹⁴ V.W. Garratt, who grew up poor in Birmingham, remembered unchaperoned picnics with his five siblings in Calthorpe Park in the 1890s

made up of acrobatics over the palings, gambols on the grass, games with an improvised ball made up of old stockings, vigorous rough and tumbles that were bound to end in tears, much slapping and kissing and threats to 'tell mamma about you,' risky skirmishes over the tennis-courts, warnings by the 'parky' with the big stick ... the sudden scare that we had exceeded our time, and finally the grand striking of camp.¹⁵

Emmie Durham, daughter of a poor horse carter, grew up in Edwardian East London, and "had to make her friends in the street or the park."¹⁶

A third type of "private" park use portrayed in literature was that for which many parks were originally designed: as a counterpart to and refuge from urban demands and problems, with physical and spiritual healing effects. As London grew larger, parks became almost the sole natural spaces within the city, and attracted parkgoers accordingly. Novels, guidebooks and poetry all extolled the restorative natural virtues of parks. An 1862 guidebook noted of Hyde Park: "here both visitor and inhabitant may alike find relief from the din and dust of the town, and enjoy the verdure and freshness of the country."¹⁷ The Illustrated London News published a drawing of fashionable society lounging in Hyde Park in 1885, noting: "The fresh air, the foliage, and the grassy spaces beyond, have a soothing effect upon nerves jaded with the pursuits of town life and with the keeping of late hours, to say nothing of political and social ambitions."¹⁸ An 1894 letter to The Times

protested against a proposal (later dropped) to extend Rotten Row into Kensington Gardens, since "Here, and nowhere else in London, can the jaded man of business or pleasure forget for a while the din and bustle of the streets and the artificialities and inanities of modern town life."¹⁹

The contrast of parks to the bustle of the city made them a particular refuge for citizens in need of solitude to think out problems. Novels provide numerous examples of lovelorn thinkers in parks. Trollope's Phineas Finn goes to the park with love troubles: "as soon as he could find a spot apart from the Sunday world, he threw himself upon the turf, and tried to fix his thoughts upon the thing that he had done."²⁰ Gregory Vigil in Galsworthy's The Country House wanders into Hyde Park to forget his hopeless love:

far in the Park, as near the centre as might be, he lay down on the grass. ...

And around him were other men lying on the grass, and some were lonely, and some hungry, and some asleep, and some were lying there for the pleasure of doing nothing and for the sake of the hot sun on their cheeks; and by the side of some lay their girls, and it was these that Gregory could not bear to see.²¹

Career, financial or legal problems also inspired trips to public parks for male characters. In Trollope's The Three Clerks, Alaric's serious career troubles are signalled by changes in his daily walk home through the parks: "This had been the cause of great enjoyment to him," but now "The time was gone when he could watch the gambols of children,

smile at the courtships of nursery-maids, watch the changes in the dark foliage of the trees, and bend from his direct path hither and thither to catch the effects of distant buildings."²² On the other hand, the more successful Phineas Finn walks in parks to compose his speeches for Parliament in both Phineas Finn and Phineas Redux.

Poems inspired by parks almost always focused upon the theme of nature as a contrast to the city. An 1856 poem, written to commemorate the opening of Birmingham's Adderley Park, pictured it as a refuge "From stifling street and populous mart ... deck'd with green and bloom."²³ An 1888 poem about Tooting-Bec Common mused on the way the park displayed the passage of seasons through parkgoers' different activities:

SPRING. ... Horsemen ride. / Groups of men, and
women too ...
SUMMER. ... Cricket, and lawn tennis, too, / Pas-
sers by, and strollers view ...
AUTUMN. ... Games of winter stand reveal'd /
Football's play'd. / Harriers, and hare and
hounds ...
WINTER ... Gazers on, walk briskly round, / Where
the skaters now are found / Whose skates ring.²⁴

Novels, children's stories and poems, then, all featured private aspects of parkgoers' lives such as lovers' trysts, family outings and solitary retreats. But the more important trend in park use in this period, a time when private life centered in the home, was publicity. Viewing others in

parks, and being viewed oneself, became an essential form of participation in an expanding public culture.

Social Display

Social encounters in public parks played an important part in the functioning of urban society in the late nineteenth century. Members of the upper and, to a lesser extent, middle classes expressed and reaffirmed their social status through participation in park rituals. At the same time, however, their activities were not only observed personally by members of other classes, but codified in etiquette guides used by the upwardly mobile. Workers also developed distinctive patterns of park behavior. These rituals helped establish social identity in a period when class boundaries had become fluid and uncertain, especially in big cities.

Fashionable Society. The most elaborate park rituals belonged to fashionable "Society". Leonore Davidoff describes Society in this period as "a system of quasi-kinship relationships which was used to 'place' mobile individuals during the period of structural differentiation fostered by industrialisation and urbanisation."²⁵ In a diverse urban setting with indeterminate class boundaries, those aspiring to social status could never be secure of their position, but constantly had to display and reconfirm it. Public

parks offered the perfect theater for the show of Society, allowing Society to define its boundaries and individual citizens to perform for a knowledgeable and critical audience. The growing importance of the public community, and of public space, meant that while fashionable Society tried to create a special identity, attempting to establish a private zone within the broad park culture, its members nevertheless craved public attention and approbation.

As Society evolved into a public spectacle, its power of exclusivity diminished. Other parkgoers could and did imitate fashionable ones, so social prestige depended on ever more subtle gradations of behavior. Dress, language, greetings, time of day, season of the year and specific spaces within the park all carried social messages, while genealogy, titles, occupation and wealth, the traditional determinants of class, faded into the background. Instead, Society set a standard for park behavior which allowed spectators to determine success or failure. These standards circulated in etiquette guidebooks as well as novels, and defined the elite of the parkgoing public.

Park etiquette evolved into a fairly uniform and widely recognized code. Davidoff argues that by the second half of the nineteenth century "the rituals of etiquette and the control of personal life by the rules of 'Society' were accepted in a more or less elaborated form according to the

means available, by all of the British middle and upper classes."²⁶ She sees etiquette as a way to "mark the knowledgeable insider from the outsider," and Michael Curtin agrees, arguing that the rules of etiquette provided an orderly public life in large cities where "privacy was threatened not by gossip and knowledgeable neighbors but by uncertain and potentially serious attacks from strangers."²⁷

In keeping with this mentality, not all parks could be equally prestigious. While St. James's Park attracted eighteenth-century London Society and Regent's Park enjoyed a brief fashionable period in the early nineteenth century, Hyde Park dominated the period from 1870 to 1920. An 1879 guidebook referred to Hyde Park as "'the park' par excellence," and casual references to "the Park" always meant Hyde Park.²⁸ In Bath, this role was played by the Royal Victoria Park, opened in 1830. In Birmingham, however, with its solid middle-class ethos and few aristocrats, there were virtually no references to fashionable gatherings in the city's public parks. In this chapter, I will use London's Hyde Park as an example of Society in action.

Living near Hyde Park in fashionable Mayfair was the first important step. Thus, Trollope's upper-class characters lived on the edges of London's central parks, as did Galsworthy's upper middle-class Forsytes, whose "residences,

placed at stated intervals round the park, watched like sentinels, lest the fair heart of this London, where their desires were fixed, should slip from their clutches, and leave them lower in their own estimations."²⁹ Successful members of Society then made twice-daily visits to the park. Davidoff notes: "The mornings during the Season were riding in Rotten Row, to see and to be seen balanced by driving in the park in the later afternoon for much the same purpose."³⁰ These appearances in the park were necessary to maintain upper-class status. In Trollope's Is He Popenjoy? (1878), the Marquis of Brotherton is advised by his doctor to walk a mile every day for his health -- in Hyde Park, of course. In Ayala's Angel (1881), "Not to be taken two or three times round the park would be to Lady Tringle to rob her of the best appreciated of all those gifts of fortune."³¹

The Sunday morning church parade in Hyde Park was a particularly fashionable park event, involving "literally thousands of people" by 1908.³² An 1892 etiquette guide described the church parade as well as the important role of spectators:

Society strolls into the Park ... Dressmakers and country bumpkins elbow one another as they point out a well-known duchess, or the new American millionaire, and work-girls with their sweet-hearts look, and admire, and envy. Society tries to be exclusive, but though it migrates perpetually ... it is still always followed by a mob.³³

They paraded until "As two o'clock strikes, or even a little before, there is a general stampede to luncheon, and in a quarter of an hour the Park is empty."³⁴ Perceptions of the church parade varied with the position of the participant. A police officer on duty in Hyde Park described the church parade as "composed principally of the nobility who reside in the neighbourhood," but a participant observed: "Of course the place is public, and the crowd is therefore mixed."³⁵

Failure to participate in Society park activities, whether through lack of interest or financial problems, could threaten all but the strongest aristocrat. In Trollope's The Small House at Allington (1864), Lady Alexandra, initially confident in her social standing, marries a middle-class man only to resent her inability to socialize in the park on their tight budget:

She would tell her husband that she never got out, and would declare, when he offered to walk with her, that she did not care for walking in the streets. ... She did not tell him that she was fond of riding, and that the Park was a very fitting place for such exercise, but she looked it, and he understood her.³⁶

Frank Greystock, in Trollope's The Eustace Diamonds (1872), must choose between the paths he can take in life as a single or a married man. Remaining single, he can enjoy "the Belgrave-cum-Pimlico life ... enveloping the parks and coming round over Park Lane" where "he might live with lords

and countesses, and rich folks generally," while if he marries, "he must retire into dim domestic security and the neighbourhood of [less fashionable] Regent's Park."³⁷ An 1896 etiquette guide sympathized with those who could not afford to drive in the park.

Yet, given such specific guidelines for park behavior, those born without social prestige could acquire it through strategic visits. An 1874 newspaper article made a plea to widen Rotten Row, since "Every season increases the numbers of those who make a point of regularly attending this evening parade of fashion" and "this ambitious class" aspiring to high society "is rapidly increasing."³⁸ Galsworthy noted how "Almost every family with any pretensions to be of the carriage class paid one visit that year to the horse-chestnuts at Bushey, or took one drive amongst the Spanish chestnuts of Richmond Park."³⁹ E.F. Benson's Lucia, a provincial wife, initially ridicules the London practice of "Sitting perhaps for half an hour in the park, with dearest Aggie pointing out to me, perhaps, with thrills of breathless excitement, a woman who was in the divorce court, or a coroneted bankrupt."⁴⁰ Yet as soon as her husband inherits some money and a London flat, she makes every effort to create a splash in London society and courts a gossip columnist to report that "She had been seen here,

there, and everywhere in London: Hermione had observed her chatting in the park with friends."⁴¹

Going to Hyde Park was not in itself enough to assure recognition as a social insider, however. Even within fashionable Society, a graduated scale of precedence operated. Parkgoers combined their own displays with critical evaluations of others through various forms of social greetings, ranging from a warm handshake down through slight bows and nods to the outright cut. Questions of when, and whether, to cut occupied pages and pages in etiquette guides. In Vanity Fair, Rawdon Crawley is cut by his estranged aunt while driving in Hyde Park: "he stood up in his stanhope; he raised his hand ready to doff his hat; he looked with all his eyes," but "she and Mrs. Bute looked him full in the face, and cut their nephew pitilessly. He sank back in his seat with an oath."⁴² When Trollope's Georgiana Longestaffe marries a rich parvenu for his money in The Way We Live Now (1874), she suffers a similar fate:

She could see it in the faces of people as they greeted her in the park ...

Could she have ridden in the park at mid-day in desirable company, and found herself in proper homes at midnight, she would have borne the rest ... But it was not so. She had her horse, but could with difficulty get any proper companion.⁴³

Social appearances in the parks also had to be made in the right clothes, and both men and women followed strict guidelines in this respect to differentiate themselves from

other parkgoers. For men, etiquette guides offered specific instructions for "park suits" at different hours of the day. In 1859, The Habits of Good Society prescribed morning dress for men: "in London, where a man is supposed to make visits as well as lounge in the Park, the frock coat of very dark blue or black, or a black cloth cut-away, the white waistcoat, and lavender gloves, are almost indispensable."⁴⁴ Another guidebook noted twenty years later:

If all you care about is not to be stared at, you may now walk about most parts of London in any ordinary English costume. If, however, you wish to go into the park during parade hours in the season ... or any other fashionable resort, gloves, chimney-pot hat, orthodox morning coat, &c., are still essential.⁴⁵

These guidelines changed only very slowly. In 1897, when a gentleman could "walk about London in the height of the season in a tweed suit," it was still "not considered correct for him to join his friends in the Park without reverting to the black coat and high hat."⁴⁶ By 1902 "lounge suits and straw hats, Homburgs or bowlers" were acceptable in the park on summer mornings, but the frock coat and silk hat were still required after lunch.⁴⁷ And Soames Forsyte in The Man of Property (1906) still changed into "Park clothes" when he returned home from work before going to sit in the park with his wife.

Upper-class women parkgoers also wore special park clothes, but with more variety than men. Ladies driving in

Rotten Row sported especially dramatic fashions designed specifically for the park. One guidebook had to caution that a long brocaded mantle or bright-colored bonnet suitable for the Row should not be worn for running errands around town. For women riders, noted an 1889 guide, "Many novelties in habits are introduced in the hunting-field, and those which find favour are often to be seen in the Park on the arrival of the season."⁴⁸ Their clothing helped to identify wealthy women in the park: children's nurses, who also frequented Hyde Park in large numbers, in summer "dressed in white pique, and in winter in grey cloth or flannel."⁴⁹

In the 1890s, when bicycling in the parks became a fashionable activity for both sexes, more casual but equally specific attire developed. An 1893 etiquette guide recommended a plain wide skirt, Norfolk jacket, soft silk handkerchief, firm shoes and close-fitting soft hat for women riders; men could wear knickerbockers with ribbed stockings, a short coat, silk handkerchief, and a peaked cap or straw hat.⁵⁰ Women horse riders could be seen, by 1902, "no longer compelled by etiquette to don the severe cloth habit and stiff silk hat, they revel in the cotton shirt and sailor 'straw'," though another guide still advised visitors: "Ladies do not wear plain frocks or 'sailor' or other plain hats in the Park, or in the afternoon in any fashion-

able part of London."⁵¹ Older parkgoers criticized these newer fashions. Ethel Tweedie recalled nostalgically in 1908:

In the eighties and nineties people dressed most smartly. ... All this is changed; a go-as-you-please air has overtaken the riders. The women wear loose coats with sack backs, cotton shirts, sailor hats, billycocks -- anything and everything that brings comfort, even if it deprives them of grace.⁵²

She found the introduction of the automobile even more depressing, with "women smothered in veils and hideous goggles, and men looking more like cut-throat villains than gentlemen ... dashing through the Park in motors."⁵³

Fashionable parkgoers not only wore special clothes, but visited the parks at carefully prescribed hours which set them apart from other park users, especially those who had to work all day. Tweedie described the schedule of a typical fashionable day in Hyde Park in 1908: the "Liver Brigade" of horse riders from 7:30 to 10:00, then the "babies and nurses" until 12:00, when "older childhood" appeared. The afternoon drive ran "from five to seven, when four or five rows of motors and carriages moving along at a crawling pace is quite a common sight," and she firmly concluded, "Certain hours are given up to certain things."⁵⁴

These hours had changed over the course of the century as meal-times became earlier. Around 1880, for example,

riding in Rotten Row took place from ten a.m. to twelve noon for "inexperienced riders and beginners," while "From twelve to two, rank and fashion, and youth and beauty, assemble in the Row."⁵⁵ Twenty years later, practice riding in the Row occurred from eight to ten a.m., with the fashionable hour from 9:30 to one, while the new activity of bicycling took place from six a.m. to noon. Upwardly mobile parkgoers unaware of these conventions might make mistakes and reveal themselves as outsiders. A man strolling around Hyde Park found in 1894 at "an unfashionable hour" found "only a few carriages, and these mostly stationary, occupied by old ladies sunning themselves under parasols."⁵⁶ Galsworthy similarly pictured a scene in 1906 in Hyde Park in "the motley hour of mid-afternoon, when foreigners and other pathetic folk drive, thinking themselves to be in fashion."⁵⁷

Not only times of the day but times of the year influenced the social cachet of appearances in Hyde Park. Davidoff describes the Season as the "calendar of events" for Society, "vastly expanded and infused with new authority in the second quarter of the century. It flourished from then on for about 120 years reaching ever wider social and geographic circles."⁵⁸ The Season ran roughly from April through July (coinciding with the sitting of Parliament), and featured special park events such as meets of the Four-

in-Hand and Coaching Clubs. In Trollope's Is He Popenjoy? park scenes "early in March, when equestrians in the Park are not numerous," contrast sharply with ones in May, when "London was bright with all the exotic gaiety of the season. The Park was crowded with riders at one, and was almost impassable at six."⁵⁹ A 1917 guide called "Chestnut Sunday" in Bushy Park "the occasion of a pilgrimage in which nearly the whole of London participates."⁶⁰ But as the fashionable season ended in August, "only foreigners with Baedekers are to be found where Society fluttered but a short time before."⁶¹

Park rituals were not wholly symbolic. In addition to facilitating the public display crucial to social status, parks served a practical function by providing a respectable public location for Society meetings and conversations, one needed since the streets were off-limits. An 1879 guide outlined this prohibition for women: "In the height of the London season," it counseled, ladies must avoid the "crowded thoroughfares, and confine their walks to the parks only."⁶² The fact that so much of society gathered in Hyde Park at certain times made a park visit a good form of communication. Both real news and gossip spread quickly. In Trollope's The Way We Live Now, news of the downfall of the fraudulent Melmotte spreads among guests invited to a ball at his house that night when one of them goes "into the park

between six and seven to pick up some hints among those who were known to have been invited."⁶³ Parks were equally fortuitous for eavesdroppers aware of this function. In Wilkie Collins' Armada, a chance encounter in a park provides a crucial plot turn when one character overhears the name of another:

I have just met (in Kensington Gardens) with the woman, whom we both only know, thus far, as the woman with the red Paisley shawl. I have traced her and her companion (a respectable-looking elderly lady) to their residence -- after having distinctly heard Allan's name mentioned between them.⁶⁴

Society park conventions were designed to identify social insiders while they participated in popular leisure activities in an open public environment. Challenges to these codes of behavior came less from those lower on the social scale, who more likely aspired to imitate them, than from upper-class women determined to use public space to loosen constraints on their own lives. Rather than being overturned completely, park etiquette evolved gradually to accommodate more active female behavior in parks. Patterns of park behavior and dress changed far more quickly for women than for men in the late nineteenth century.

One key constraint was that which proscribed respectable women being alone in public. In 1879, a guidebook advised that even married women "usually prefer the society of another lady" when walking in the park, and "A young lady

would not walk by herself, but would be accompanied either by a relative or governess;" though it admitted that "Some young ladies aspire to the unconventionalism of walking by themselves," it condemned this practice as "by no means in good taste."⁶⁵ Thackeray made fun of the ubiquitous practice of chaperones for walks in the park, painting a picture in Vanity Fair of women like

lovely, daring Mrs. Mantrap, who will ride at any fence which any man in England will take, and who drives her greys in the park, while her mother keeps a huckster's stall in Bath still --even those who are so bold, one might fancy there could face anything dare not face the world without a female friend. ... you will hardly see them in any public place without a shabby companion in a dyed silk, sitting somewhere in the shade close behind them.⁶⁶

Trollope's Ayala's Angel illustrates this rule when two orphaned sisters are sent to live with different relatives on opposite sides of Hyde Park. Though the actual distance is not far, the sisters are effectively separated, and Lucy asks Ayala: "I wonder how we shall see each other; I cannot walk across the Park alone."⁶⁷

Yet this rule was already dissolving. In the same novel, Lucy, sent to live with struggling middle-class relatives while her sister Ayala lives with the wealthy ones, discovers this discrepancy. Though it was "generally understood that there are raging lions around the metropolis, who would certainly eat up young ladies whole if young ladies were to walk about the streets or even about the

parks by themselves," her aunt concluded that "lions eat up chiefly rich people. Young ladies who must go about without ... attendants of any sort, are not often eaten or even roared at."⁶⁸ So Lucy is sent alone for daily walks in Kensington Gardens.

Her own behavior is tested when she sees her long-lost lover in the park. Instinctively, she is afraid to call to him: "For a moment there was an impulse on her to run after him and to call his name. ... but the thought was expelled quickly. Though she might lose him again and forever she could not do that."⁶⁹ On another occasion he calls to her in the park, but she is again afraid because he is walking with a male friend she does not know: "she could only bow to him, only mutter something, and then pass on. How can a girl stand and speak to a gentleman in public, especially when that gentleman has a friend with him?"⁷⁰ Eventually, though, she gains enough courage to greet him in the park, to renew their relationship and eventually to marry him.

Women acquired more freedom to meet female friends in parks as well as lovers. As the century drew to a close, Davidoff notes, "there was beginning to be provision for respectable women to meet in public places outside their own homes."⁷¹ By 1896, an etiquette book exclaimed: "What further liberty of action can young, unmarried girls desire than is at the present moment accorded to them? ... They may

'bike' in the Park ... They may ride together, and may be joined, either 'biking' or riding, by their male friends-." ⁷² In 1902, a young lady could "walk by herself in the Park for the purpose of joining her friends and acquaintances," though she still "should not sit alone." ⁷³ Some restrictions remained longer. As a young girl, she later recalled, Lady Violet Brandon "was never allowed to go out alone, even for a walk in the London parks." ⁷⁴ Not until World War I did these limits really dissolve.

Working-Class Rituals. Working-class Londoners often acted as spectators and critics of the carriage classes in their rituals. In Charles Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit, the parks are an attraction for Mr. Jenkins, who was "a regular frequenter of the Parks on Sundays ... knowing a great many carriages by sight." ⁷⁵ A more active role is taken by Jenny Wren in his Our Mutual Friend, who describes her research for the dolls' clothes she makes: "There's a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fete, or what you like. ... I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me." ⁷⁶ Such observers helped to validate the social status acquired by fashionable parkgoers through park displays.

But while the upper and middle classes socialized in Hyde Park for an audience often composed at least partly of workers, the working classes also developed their own ritual

social displays in other open spaces by the late nineteenth century. Like their more fashionable counterparts, workers evidenced a desire both to participate in the publicity of park culture, and to retain some specific group identity through specific habits of park visits, and through spatial segregation. Workers typically used their more limited free time to celebrate in less central, less structured open spaces. One popular spot, Hampstead Heath, became well known for working-class parkgoers.

While published codes of behavior akin to fashionable etiquette guides did not exist for working-class culture (downward mobility being less attractive than upward), both workers themselves and upper- and middle-class observers produced records of their park traditions. A pamphlet lobbying for the preservation of Hampstead Heath in 1857 noted it was "resorted to all through the summer by thousands of every class and age," but particularly stressed visits by "parents and children of the lower orders."⁷⁷ A journeyman engineer documenting working-class culture noted ten years later that "On each of the three great occasions, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the bulk of the working classes secure from three days to a week's holiday, holding revel in parks and other public places during the day."⁷⁸ By 1898, a guide to London's municipal parks informed readers: "there is no spot around the Metropolis which is

more identified with the holiday life of a Londoner than the heath. To a Cockney "'Ampstead 'Eath' is par excellence the place to spend a happy day," since "he finds here more liberty than in the trim elegance of the parks."⁷⁹

Descriptions of working-class park rituals painted a substantially noisier and more active picture than that of fashionable society in the more central and enclosed parks. "Open spaces" typically permitted a broader range of activities, and even the more limited bye-laws applied to open spaces were normally suspended on major holidays. In addition, since workers felt less threatened by outsiders than the fashionable elite, their identifying behavior did not have to be so subtle. A 1900 guide described Hampstead Heath as "one of the favourite playgrounds of London, crowded on holidays by sometimes roisterous merrymakers."⁸⁰ Galsworthy described a typical Bank Holiday on Hampstead Heath in the 1920s as filled with frenetic activity:

Along the top and over on the heath to north and south the holiday swarms surged, in perfect humour, carrying paper bags. Round the pond children, with thin, grey-white, spindly legs, were paddling and shrilly chattering, too content to smile. Elderly couples crawled slowly by ... Girls and young men were few, for they were dispersed already on the heath, in search of a madder merriment. On benches, in chairs of green canvas or painted wood, hundreds were sitting ... Hawkers cried goods. Fat dark women told fortunes. Policemen stood cynically near them. A man talked and talked and took his hat round.⁸¹

In addition to Hampstead Heath, Victoria Park and Battersea Park attracted large numbers of London workers who lived nearer to those parks. The Daily News wrote in 1874: "Battersea-park, as everyone knows, is largely frequented by the working classes of London, partly on account of its very varied attractions, and partly on account of its being so easy of access from almost all quarters of the metropolis," and concluded, "There is no busier place in London than this Park on a summer evening."⁸² A park guide similarly noted of Victoria Park in 1898: "This splendid playground of the East End is quite as dear to the industrial population who frequent it as the sweeping drives and pleasant walks of the West End parks to their fashionable visitors."⁸³ Thus, for workers as well as aristocrats, ritualized social encounters in public parks became a common method both of defining class identity and of interacting with other members of the public. In each case, the presence of spectators contributed a central ingredient to the equation, and such spectators became increasingly prominent with the growth of tourism which included city parks.

Tourism

The introduction of tourism added a new dimension to park use, not only in London but in provincial cities as well. Bath used the creation of new parks in an effort to

sustain its tourist industry. Both the natural features of parks, and even more the activities of the parkgoers who customarily used them, formed objects of interest to provincial and foreign visitors. The growth in publication of city and park guidebooks and even park histories shows how parks became increasingly important in the tourist industry, and the many visitors to urban parks in this period themselves played a crucial role in the enactment of the social rituals described above.

Some visitors, particularly those from the provinces, made appearances in public parks in apparent hopes of being taken for members of Society. In Armadale, the provincial lawyer Pedgift takes advantage of a rare trip to London to declare: "It's a habit of mine when I'm in London to air myself among the aristocracy. Yours truly, sir, has an eye for a fine woman and a fine horse; and when he's in Hyde Park he's quite in his native element."⁸⁴ In Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters (1864), a provincial woman also likes to visit Hyde Park when in London, and her husband encourages her: "Dress yourself up as fine as any on 'em, and buy what you like ... and go to the park and the play, and show off with the best on 'em."⁸⁵ It's unlikely that such efforts would meet with recognition from social insiders, but the consciousness of role-playing was part of the attraction for tourists.

Other visitors symbolized innocent, healthy personalities in contrast to more dissipated Londoners. In Trollope's The Last Chronicle of Barset (1867), Lily Dale finds that "This coming up to London, and riding in the Park ... seemed to unsettle her."⁸⁶ When a ride in Hyde Park leads to an unpleasant encounter with a former lover who has jilted her, she complains about the crowds of Society in the park: "It seems to me that the people don't go there to walk, but to stand still ... I cannot understand how so many people can bear to loiter about in that way -- leaning on the rails and doing nothing."⁸⁷ In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles," the threatened heir and his doctor come up to London to consult with Sherlock Holmes, and while the doctor educates himself at a medical museum, the heir admits sheepishly, "I went to look at the folk in the park."⁸⁸

Such habits were not lost on writers of travel guides. Public parks soon achieved a prominent place in city guidebooks, city histories and even books devoted exclusively to public parks. The flourishing business of guidebooks further signalled the importance that parks had achieved in city life. Authors used parks as symbols of a city's culture, recommending visitors to seek out parks not only to admire their beauties, or to participate in leisure activities there, but for another reason. Public parks now

offered what many guides represented as a unique opportunity to view public life "in action" in British cities.

London, with its long-standing royal parks, merited the earliest references by guidebooks. By mid-century, these parks had already become mandatory stops for tourists in the capital. An 1849 guide to London listed the central royal parks under the heading "Places Which A Stranger In London Must See," while an 1862 guide likewise thought London's parks "one of its best and most attractive features," and "a sight you should not fail seeing."⁸⁹ Some guidebooks waxed eloquent over the beauties of trees and gardens, or noted opportunities for swimming, boating, skating, band concerts, and visits to the zoo and botanical gardens. Others cited seasonal festivities, like the "musical promenades ... from May to August" given in the Regent's Park Botanic Gardens or the "mile-long avenue of horse chestnuts [which] attract thousands of visitors, especially on 'Chestnut Sunday'" in Bushy Park.⁹⁰

Yet most travel writers found parkgoers themselves the most compelling attraction. An 1851 guidebook highlighted the use of Hyde Park as "the place of daily concourse for all the aristocracy resident in London during 'the season'."⁹¹ With the elaboration of fashionable social rituals, guidebooks offered lengthy descriptions of this behavior, and even advised visitors how best to fit in by

following park etiquette. Nathan Cole wrote in 1877 of Hyde Park: "for a stranger to be in London during the season and not to visit it would be to miss a sight where beauty, fashion, wealth, luxury, and not a few men of rank and distinction from all parts of Europe, congregate."⁹² Such guides normally specified the fashionable hours for the uninitiated: "To see England's fashion and beauty in perfection, strangers should be in Hyde Park any afternoon from four to seven, in the season," noted an 1881 guide.⁹³

Not only aristocrats merited mentions in these works. An 1852 guide described a much wider range of park users, including "the pale mechanic and the exhausted factory operative," "the busy shopkeeper and the more speculative merchant," "the family troop, the children with their nurses," and "the day-tasked official, the night-worn senator, the slaves of business, and the votaries of fashion, even royalty itself;" in fact, this guide described "all classes of the community ... all availing themselves of the air and exercise, and scenes of gaiety and opportunities of social intercourse and enjoyment which these much-frequented places afford."⁹⁴ A 1907 guide noted that the parks "appeal to all sections of the community, to the workers as well as to the idlers, to the rich as well as to the poor, to the thoughtful as well as to the careless," now

stressing diversity with less emphasis on class distinctions.⁹⁵

Travel guidebooks even catered to those specifically interested in observing working-class social rituals. An 1879 Dictionary of London recommended not only a visit to Hyde Park to watch fashionable society, but also advocated investigating other types: "Victoria-park is one of the things which no student of London life should miss seeing, and its most characteristic times are Saturday and Sunday evenings."⁹⁶ A 1902 guide agreed, and gave similar advice: "The curious, who desire to see East London at play, are advised to visit Victoria Park on a fine Saturday afternoon or evening."⁹⁷ In Hyde Park, early morning and evening swimming hours in the Serpentine attracted "a crowd of men and boys, most of them in very homely attire," described as "a scene of a very unsophisticated character."⁹⁸

Later guides reflected the increasing importance of parks by describing a broader range of parkgoers and their activities. Public meetings, as described in the last chapter, attracted particular attention. An 1898 guide mentioned not only fashionable society in Hyde Park, but also cyclists, bands, "much speechifying" and "mass meetings."⁹⁹ The presence of "preachers, spouters, and open-air lecturers ... political 'demonstrations'" in Hyde Park and "a great spouting of preachers and temperance and

socialist orators" in Regent's Park on Sundays was noted by a 1900 guide, while a 1902 guide advised that Hyde Park was both a "much frequented resort of the fashionable world and ... the meeting place of the thousands of the democracy."¹⁰⁰

London's park officials quickly noticed the opportunities in commercially-published guides and park tourism, and began publishing their own contributions. In 1869 the MBW park superintendent published a guide to London's parks. The LCC issued its own park guides beginning in 1898, though the OW did not do so until well into the twentieth century. The first LCC guide, illustrated with photographs, described the history of open spaces in London and the facilities of each municipal park, including key activities like women's bicycling in Battersea Park, which it called "part of the national life."¹⁰¹ Some local borough councils also issued their own guides, as did transportation companies promoting their transport systems as ideal methods to reach public parks. An 1888 District Railway Guide street provided detailed historical information about parks served by its routes. Other guides were more brief, but all were designed, as the London General Omnibus Company wrote in 1915, "to make the public gardens of London better known," and of course to increase business.¹⁰²

With the increasing popularity of parks, new books focused exclusively on parks, and gave detailed information on their histories. Jacob Larwood's 1881 chronicle of Hyde Park, St. James's Park and the Green Park stressed riots, crimes and royal incidents representing "the life and manners of bygone generations," which he thought illustrated "the shifting about of fashion, and, at the same time, the steady and uninterrupted march of progress."¹⁰³ Mrs. Cecil's 1907 guide outlined historical events from past centuries as well as more recent occurrences such as the Queen Caroline riots, the reform riots, the Great Exhibition, and changes in bye-laws and gardening practices.

Hyde Park, the most central and fashionable park in London, spawned a whole genre of park books devoted to it exclusively by the end of the nineteenth century. John Ashton published an 1896 guide running "from Domesday-Book to date" which drew on past history as well as the author's own experience. Ashton approved of ceremonies and military reviews, but deplored public meetings and demonstrations which he considered his "very disagreeable task to chronicle."¹⁰⁴ Ethel Tweedie took a different approach in her 1908 history of Hyde Park, dismissing the 1866 reform riots as "an accident, and almost a joke."¹⁰⁵ W.L. Fleetwood's history of Hyde Park, published the following year, thought:

"Few places can be of greater interest to the modern Londoner ... The past and present here appear to meet."¹⁰⁶

But beyond park history, these park books also described details of the interaction of different social groups in parks and the spectators who watched them. Tweedie explained the process through which "the classes divide themselves" within Hyde Park: for example, "In the summer evenings excellent music is given, but very few of the upper-ten avail themselves of the privilege which the middle classes so eagerly enjoy. It is a great occasion for shop people and servants."¹⁰⁷ Yet she clearly understood these separations to occur within the context of a unified public identity. Thus, she called Hyde Park "The meeting-ground of King and coster," and "the most truly democratic spot in all London;" a place where "Passions of class distinction are subdued."¹⁰⁸

Writers about parks also acknowledged the role of spectators and tourists in park activities. Tweedie described Hyde Park as a great outdoor performance: "the playground of London's rich and poor, the wide theatre upon which their tragedies or comedies have been enacted, the forum in which many public liberties have been demanded, the scene where national triumphs have been celebrated."¹⁰⁹ A Hyde Park police officer also experienced the advent of tourism there, writing of the park: "It is familiar to both

old and young, rich and poor -- not only to Londoners, but to visitors from all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to say nothing of America and Continental countries."¹¹⁰

George Sims' 1902 Living London pictured park activities ranging from a meet of the fashionable Coaching Club in Hyde Park to tramps sleeping in St. James's Park. It recommended a visit to Hyde Park for "the tourist or chance visitor, for here can be seen from day to day the outdoor life of the Prince or the tramp, who has each his own ideas when visiting the park."¹¹¹ Like other such works, Living London stressed the diversity and interaction of park users as well as their subtle separations. In St. James's Park,

The usual urchins are not missing ...

Gentle maiden ladies of uncertain age pace slowly ... Nurses with their charges bring bags of cake and bread wherewith to feed the swans ... Clerks, in their dinner hour ... snatch a breath of London air; and all about on the ever-convenient seats are workgirls from the dress-making ateliers reading cheap love-stories and bolting a hasty and indigestible meal. Sometimes the King's Guard rides proudly through ...

boys are playing cricket. Little girls loll about on the grass; and tramps ... lie on their backs.¹¹²

The essay concludes: "if there be any truth in the axiom that the proper study of mankind is man, there is no better opportunity than that afforded in London's parks, where high, low, rich and poor, great and small continuously pass

and re-pass before our eyes."¹¹³ By the twentieth century, public parks were acknowledged icons of the publicity of city life.

Tourism was not confined to London, of course. Bath had a long history of attracting visitors and inspired numerous guidebooks. Its first public park, the Royal Victoria Park, opened in 1830, and in 1843, visitors to the park could expect to see "Groups of gay and elegantly-attired pedestrians" and "handsome equipages" not unlike those described in Hyde Park, while another guide a few years later referred to the park as "Bath's greatest ornament."¹¹⁴ Like London guides, Bath guides considered a visit to its park essential by the late nineteenth century. An 1870 guidebook advised: "whatever else the stranger may omit seeing, he ought not to be deterred from paying it a visit."¹¹⁵ An 1899 guide boasted that the gardening merited the praises of even "experienced visitors."¹¹⁶

Guidebooks discussed a greater variety of park activities in Bath by the end of the nineteenth century, including band concerts and floral fetes, tennis, cycling, and visits to the botanic garden, as temptations for tourists. The local press praised the opening of a second park in 1889 as a new potential tourist site, hoping to "make the little Park one of the great attractions to visitors as well as to

citizens."¹¹⁷ During World War I, when band concerts were suspended in most British parks, Bathonians argued to continue them since "in the interest of Bath as a Health Resort, which invites visitors to sojourn within our pleasure-giving confines, they are urgently necessary," and citizens felt the same about flowers: "Floral embellishment in resorts like Bath and Harrogate demands expenditure which is a necessity."¹¹⁸

Bath travel guides also described social diversity and distinctive patterns of use by its parkgoers. A letter to the Bath Chronicle in 1889 noted that the park's evening concerts were mainly attended by "young women, clerks, and shop lads," while afternoon concerts in the same park in the early twentieth century attracted primarily "the leisured ladies of Bath."¹¹⁹ Parkgoers themselves, however, did not seem to form the same attraction to tourists that they did in London. City histories tended to emphasize the history of the founding of the Royal Victoria Park, in particular the role played by the town's citizens in initiating and continuing to subscribe to the project, and the visit of Princess Victoria in 1830 when the park was given its name, rather than its current uses.

Birmingham's early travel guides emphasized the city's industrial achievements, and the city's first public park did not open until 1856. By 1880, however, a guide high-

lighted royal visits to Birmingham's parks. Rather than describing variety in parkgoers, Birmingham guides tended to stress overall attendance statistics, noting that in Aston Park alone, "hundreds of thousands of visitors find recreation, pure air and health," while in the parks as a whole "in 1878 upwards of 5,000,000 visitors are estimated to have entered."¹²⁰ An 1879 article quoted the Mayor: "That the people appreciated the parks already provided was testified by the thousands who visited them on all occasions."¹²¹ Parkgoers in Birmingham tended to come largely from the lower ends of the social scale. A young London woman who visited the city in 1887 mentioned both Cannon Hill and Aston Parks in her diary, noting of the former that it was "Much frequented by artizans."¹²² But a guide identified Calthorpe Park as "the resort of children and their nurses" as well as "the local Volunteer Corps" in 1889.¹²³

Nearly all Birmingham guides identified Cannon Hill Park as the pre-eminent one: "the most beautiful of all the public gardens," or "the most decorative park," but on aesthetic rather than social grounds; in the general absence of fashionable society in Birmingham, it did not play the same social role as London's Hyde Park.¹²⁴ Other guides highlighted facilities for boating, cricket and other sports in parks.

Birmingham park authorities did pioneer park guides, however. The curator of Aston Park and Hall published a guide to the park in 1871 including its history and regulations. The first Parks Department-published guide was issued in 1914 with a map and descriptions of recreational facilities, because "The Committee are anxious for a freer and fuller use to be made of the City's open spaces by all ages in all classes of the public."¹²⁵ A 1916 edition highlighted the parks' most popular attractions, and again downplayed social functions. In Cannon Hill Park, "The carpet bedding in the park has always been a feature of interest," and "The aviaries in the park have also afforded great interest, especially to children and young people," but an attempt to recreate Hyde Park's Rotten Row for fashionable horse-riders had "never been used to any appreciable extent."¹²⁶ Instead, this guide noted the most popular playground equipment, such as the sandpits and "Joywheel" which delighted "the hundreds of poor children who use this [Oxygen Street] playground."¹²⁷ Organized sports programs for poor children in parks were described as an activity for which "parents, as well as children, expressed their appreciation."¹²⁸

As in Bath, park guides devoted much space to the creation of parks in Birmingham, and stressed the identification of the city's parks with local government: "The

story of our modern city parks is essentially a chapter of modern municipal history."¹²⁹ Histories of the town's parks emphasized the role played by the Town Council in their creation and management and praised its aggressiveness. In Birmingham, as in London and Bath, public parks came to represent the progressive side of city life, attracting tourists who then further increased the central role played by parks.

Conclusion

Public park use played a larger and larger role in daily city life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by providing locations for private recreation. More importantly, parks inspired urban residents to participate in rituals of public social recognition and social mobility in their parks. The presence of spectators provided a crucial part of the process of social validation. The growing importance of a public identity in this transitional period meant that urban residents no longer sought complete social segregation from other groups, but rather attempted to define semi-private zones within the larger framework of diverse public interaction.

Specific forms of dress and conversation and visits to particular parks at certain times of day or year sent signals to social equals as well as watching spectators.

The most elaborate park behavioral code applied to fashionable Society, but workers also developed distinctive habits in parks. The differing class geography of London (with a small constant Society presence, greatly enlarged in the Season), Bath (a somewhat fashionable resort town, largely dependent on tourism), and Birmingham (not fashionable, but noted for its middle-class industry and municipal reforms) accounts for their different experiences of social rituals in public parks.

Yet these ritualized park behaviors also contained a certain flexibility. Their very publicity and imitability left them constantly vulnerable to the entrance of outsiders and to pressure from upper-class women. At the same time, class and gender differences in leisure habits weakened over this period, making social boundaries less meaningful in this area of life. Parkgoers gained new knowledge of urban subcultures through visits to watch and participate in social interactions in public parks. The publication of new etiquette and travel guides and novels describing such forms of park use further underlined the paradox of attempts to retain social distinctions. In fact, common use of public parks by citizens of different social status, gender, age, religious or political persuasion, in itself proved a homogenizing influence integral to a broader urban public culture.

Galsworthy's 1921 novel To Let uses his character Soames Forsyte, reflecting on a lifetime of visits to Hyde Park, to summarize this changed and broadened public:

No greater change in all England than in the Row! ... he could remember it from 1860 on. Brought there as a child between the crinolines to stare at tight-trousered dandies in whiskers, riding with a cavalry seat; to watch the doffing of curly-brimmed and white top hats; ... you never saw them now. You saw no quality of any sort, indeed, just working people sitting in dull rows with nothing to stare at but a few young bouncing females in pot hats, riding astride, or desultory Colonials charging up and down on dismal-looking hacks; with, here and there, little girls on ponies, or old gentlemen jogging their livers, or an orderly trying a great galumphing cavalry horse; no thoroughbreds, no grooms, no bowing, no scraping, no gossip -- nothing; only the trees the same ... A democratic England -- dishevelled, hurried, noisy, and seemingly without an apex.¹³⁰

Urban elites like Soames Forsyte looked back on days of greater segregation in parks with nostalgia, but they had themselves taken a key step in making the public parks truly representative of the more inclusive public such spaces implied.

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CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC CEREMONIES, PUBLIC SPACE

Introduction

Britain's public parks witnessed a surge in large public ceremonies in the years between 1870 and 1920, including royal jubilees, coronations and peace celebrations, as well as numerous smaller events, most of them originated by government officials but largely shaped by the public and the press. As the most formal of park uses, these rituals focused sharply on the contested role of public space in city life. Differences of class, gender, politics and age could pose challenges to event planners, whose decisions about ceremonial activities and methods of funding depended upon their interpretations of social and cultural relationships. Not just entertainment, but the symbolic representation of the community and its future, were at stake.

But despite disagreements, or perhaps through them, ordinary citizens evinced a genuine interest in ceremonies which added a new dimension to their everyday use of parks, volunteering to provide refreshments, decorations or fireworks, and to organize children's parties or sporting events. Ceremonies also, particularly in London, attracted huge numbers of provincial and foreign tourists, and inspired massive press coverage. These public rituals helped to build a new definition of citizenship, involving

members of the public not only as spectators but as crucial participants in the ceremonial process.

Historians such as David Cannadine and Eric Hobsbawm have applied anthropological methods to the rituals and traditions of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. Cannadine links the more frequent performance of royal ceremonial towards the end of the nineteenth century to the increased popularity of the British monarchy. This change was sparked when Queen Victoria became Empress of India in 1877, increasing her symbolic role as her actual political power declined.¹ The press was also an important element, since "the great royal ceremonies were described with unprecedented immediacy and vividness in a sentimental, emotional, admiring way, which appealed to a broader cross section of the public than ever before."² Other factors in this revitalization included more impressive urban architecture, a musical renaissance and increased commercial exploitation. Cannadine views ceremonies in London, the seat of government, as more consensual, more conservative and more imperialistic than those elsewhere in Britain, while his work on Cambridge stresses the way in which conflicts between the university and the town hampered the planning process and obstructed the creation of a public consensus.³ However, he does not consider the relationship of these events to the use of public space such as parks.

The 1887 Jubilee has attracted specific attention from historians. Thomas Richards includes it in his study of advertising, summing it up as "a new spectacle of commodity culture, the spectacle of kitsch."⁸ Focusing on the many souvenirs and advertisements centered on the event, he argues that the Jubilee "gave commodities a strong sense of national and international purpose," and sees Victoria herself as a representation of "transcendent materiality," "the consumer queen."⁹ Dorothy Thompson's biography of Queen Victoria, on the other hand, focuses upon the way in which the Jubilee was "aimed at holding together the complex and often competing strands that made up the empire, the country and the metropolis."¹⁰ Conway includes a few ceremonial events in her study, but they merely form a background to her examination of commemorative statuary. Again, these historians do not consider the role of parks in ceremonies.

The historian of parks must therefore explore the role parks played in the construction of public ceremonies, and their effect on the urban community as a whole. The large numbers of new public ceremonies held in mostly new public parks helped create a more democratic view of city life, one befitting a community increasingly defined more by common park ownership and park use than by divisions of class, gender or other attributes. This chapter will analyze the

planning, performance and reaction to park ceremonies between 1870 and 1920 in order to highlight the effect of public participation in these events. New public parks allowed citizens to become active factors in public life, and ceremonies in particular helped build a sense of community founded on civic pride as well as national and imperial rhetoric.

London, as the capital, dominated national rejoicings. While national holidays were celebrated all over the country, many Britons journeyed to London for such occasions. Birmingham sometimes proved more reluctant to join in national events, perhaps because the town itself had such strong civic pride. Bath's consciousness of its historic importance, augmented by the 1871 discovery of Roman ruins, meant its ceremonies were meticulously planned, with particular attention given to the establishment and maintenance of local tradition.

This chapter will first compare three large ceremonies held in public parks in London, Birmingham and Bath: Queen Victoria's 1887 Jubilee, King George V's 1911 coronation and the peace celebrations after World War I. Two additional perspectives will then be considered. First, local ceremonies set a precedent for larger events by focusing attention on local communities and their own central spaces, the parks. Second, the national and imperial content in larger

public park ceremonies increased around the turn of the century, as citizenship became a more important ideal. In all these cases ceremonies, as a new use of public space, transformed both the parks and the parkgoers who used them.

Victoria's Golden Jubilee

June 1887 marked Queen Victoria's fiftieth year on the throne, and her Golden Jubilee inaugurated a new ceremonial style in Britain. As Hobsbawm points out, the democratic nature of these festivities was a successful government innovation. Extensive press coverage of planned activities meant the Jubilee mesmerized the public far in advance with articles, advertisements and souvenirs. Most newspapers issued special Jubilee editions, and sometimes separate Jubilee guides. The Graphic noted: "A large part of the population, especially among the fair sex and the young, are at the present moment far more interested in the festivities and ceremonies of next week than in any other public subject whatever."¹¹ Punch's satirical offerings also portrayed the Jubilee as the topic of the moment. London filled up with spectators, prompting some Londoners to suggest: "they ought to stay at home. The Jubilee will lose much of its genuine significance unless it is heartily celebrated in each locality, and how can this be done if those who ought

to be the leaders of society in their respective dwelling-places decide to scamper off to London?"¹²

London's public parks, both royal and municipal, performed two functions at the Jubilee. They provided seating for those watching the Queen's procession to the thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey, and they hosted numerous children's festivities, which many adults helped to plan and also attended as spectators. Much was made of the need to impress children with the importance of the occasion through these massive, regimented activities including them as participants. The Graphic concluded disapprovingly: "the weakness of the present age is for entertainments on a mammoth scale. The pleasure produced to the people concerned is the last thing thought of; the bigness of the show is the important point," but remained in the minority on this issue.¹³

The London Children's Jubilee Fund, headed by the Prince of Wales and sponsored by the Daily Telegraph, raised money from the public to entertain 30,000 schoolchildren (selected by ballot) in Hyde Park. After being assembled in St. James's and Regent's Parks, the children were marched in brigades into the east end of Hyde Park, which was decorated with "Venetian masts, covered with scarlet cloth, surmounted with crowns and pinnacles, and adorned with shields and flag-trophies; festoons of flags and greenery were suspended

from each to each," topped with a large velvet banner reading "God bless our Queen -- not Queen alone, but Mother, Queen and Friend in one!"¹⁴ Once inside their private area, roped off from the crowds of spectators, the children's amusements included 20 marionette theatres, 86 cosmoramic views, 9 troupes of performing dogs, monkeys, and ponies, hundreds of "Aunt Sallies" and "knock-em-downs," balloons and prizes, as well as food and drink and a visit from the Queen herself.

Victoria listened to the children sing "God Save the Queen" and "Rule Britannia," and presented one symbolically "good" child, with a perfect school attendance record, with a memorial Jubilee cup; cups were later distributed to the rest of the children. The Daily Telegraph reported happily: "it has brought the East and the West of London closer than ever together, and has sowed the good seed of a loyal and mindful patriotism."¹⁵ A Bath paper commented enviously: "At the most impressionable period of human life the school children of London have been favoured with a chance not only of taking part personally in the national rejoicings, but of manifesting their devotion to the Queen herself."¹⁶

Despite some squabbling before the Jubilee, afterwards this feeling of self-congratulation seemed ubiquitous. In contrast to previous royal events, which had given Britain a poor reputation on the Continent, the official ceremonies

had been smoothly performed. Even more important, the press had found the hoped-for harmony among the audience. The conservative Daily Telegraph approved the crowds going over the festivity sights the day before the Jubilee: "We do not often get high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to mix together in this cordial and friendly fashion ... [a] lesson of toleration and goodwill," and after the ceremony it boasted: "The harvest of so deep and true a union of all hearts and minds ... will link class and class together in closer bonds of good feeling."¹⁷ The Illustrated London News agreed:

The sincerity and cordiality with which Londoners of all classes have entered into the purpose of this Jubilee cannot be mistaken. They did not merely stare at the banner, emblems, and mottoes displayed in the streets, as a gay and pretty show, but comments were overheard in the crowd that bespoke a lively sense of patriotic pride and honest friendship to the Royal family.¹⁸

Contemporary literature echoed this theme. In George Gissing's novel In the Year of the Jubilee, young, middle-class Nancy Lord overcomes her father's objections and attends the festivities, where "she was one of millions walking about the streets ... A procession this, greatly more significant than that of Royal personages earlier in the day."¹⁹

The Jubilee was somewhat anticlimactic in Birmingham, which had been visited by the Queen only three months earlier, when she opened new Law Courts there. Birmingham's

mayor, who had arranged a lavish welcome for her, had been knighted as a reward. But the Jubilee had to be financed entirely by public subscription, though it managed to include a parade of local Volunteers, feasts for young and old and fireworks in the parks. Some shopkeepers complained about the mandatory Bank Holiday which had been decreed by the government for Jubilee Day. The conservative Daily Gazette thought that Birmingham would look "particularly gloomy" for all but the "schoolchildren and aged folk," since

The programme as it now stands is very meagre compared with the bill of rejoicings prepared in other large towns. ... [but] To lie in the shade doing nothing is a capital recipe for a hot day; and loyalty to the Throne can be as accurately displayed in this as in any other way -- such is the popular opinion. ... Some ten or twenty thousand people will jubilate according to arrangement. The hundred thousand will play variations on the old Bank Holiday customs.²⁰

The liberal Daily Post agreed: "In Birmingham there is, no doubt, a feeling that our Jubilee celebration has been already accomplished, and with rare credit to the town."²¹

Domestic servants and teachers wrote letters of complaint to the newspapers, pleading that they might be granted holidays for the Jubilee, but in this atmosphere they succeeded only in eliciting sarcastic comments about their lack of devotion to their duty. "This is the last straw," wrote one irate citizen in response, "the country should put its foot firmly down and check the growth of this

jubilee monster before it entirely gets the upper hand of us."²² The suburb of Handsworth, which celebrated by opening a new park, found "The project was carried out in the face of considerable opposition," apparently because the residents feared "roughs" being introduced into the neighborhood.²³

Other Birmingham citizens showed enthusiasm, however. The Daily Mail thought: "If the present year were to produce some new form of lunacy it would certainly deserve to be christened 'Jubilemania.' ... There is an infection about the whole thing, and the contagion touches us whether we will or not."²⁴ Aston Park featured a large carpet-bedded imperial crown facing Birmingham's coat of arms. One citizen convinced the park committee to open Aston Park late to allow the best fireworks viewing. The Birmingham Sunday School Union used Cannon Hill, Small Heath, Aston and Summerfield Parks to throw fetes for schoolchildren, to which the adult public were admitted for twopence apiece. Finally, the Volunteers marched to Calthorpe Park, where their salute was "much appreciated" by some fifteen thousand spectators.²⁵ But on the whole, "With so few temptations to stop in town it was not surprising to see how eagerly the opportunities for a day in the country were availed of," the Daily Mail concluded.²⁶

Bath, on the other hand, reacted to the Jubilee with so many ideas for celebration that preparations bogged down in controversy over the choice between a new public building or more informal festivities. This impasse led to frustration and apathy. The Chronicle grumbled in May: "Interest appears to be waning instead of growing, apathy and not heartiness is the indication given by the public pulse."²⁷

Various reasons were offered for the lack of interest. One citizen thought the "utter lack of enthusiasm" could be "partly explained by the studied neglect of Bath by nearly every branch of the Royal family."²⁸ The liberal Herald commented:

It would be difficult to find the person who will not be pleased next week to know that the Jubilee is past, and that, at last, there will be some chance of returning once more into the ordinary grooves of life without constantly being confronted with the word 'jubilee,'

and pointed out "That the occasion has, in some respects, been an excuse for carrying things to a ridiculous extent no one will deny ... many of the modes of celebration which have been proposed are absurd and ridiculous."²⁹ Keene's Bath Journal argued more specifically: "the whole course of this Jubilee business in Bath has been marked by mismanagement and pervaded by blunder;" the committee's "deliberate refusal to advertise the subscription lists in the local newspaper was accountable ... for much of their failure to get funds."³⁰ Yet all these papers took pains to report

the Jubilee committee's progress, and a week later the Journal anticipated: "the festivities will far eclipse all previous efforts in this direction."³¹

There was some concern that a procession representing all parts of the city's population would take away from the dignity of the day. At one committee meeting, a member

provoked some merriment when he suggested that the traction engines in the district should be requisitioned and decorated to take part in the procession. The laughter was increased when the Mayor remarked that a gentleman had in all sober seriousness appealed to him to ask the committee to allow Messrs. Wombwell [a travelling zoo] to put their elephants in the procession.³²

But worries were pacified, and the program finally was arranged around a civic procession from the Guildhall to the Royal Victoria Park. As in London, children formed a central focus of Jubilee park activities. Public enthusiasm finally appeared in the days before the celebration: "Day after day fresh Jubilee 'outbreaks' manifest themselves, and it is impossible to go far in any direction without meeting with some sign of loyalty. The citizens have risen equal to the occasion."³³ One columnist confessed: "It is an Englishman's privilege to grumble and most of us have exercised the privilege right heartily over the Jubilee," but then urged, "It enables us to lay aside for a brief space those differences which at present so bitterly divide parties and to join (with the exception of a very inconsiderable minority)

as common subjects of the monarch in a national festival."³⁴

On Jubilee Day, Victoria Park was covered with "a profusion of floral decorations," with flags at the main entrances.³⁵ The Chronicle reported: "large numbers of people commenced to assemble in the Royal Victoria Park ... The scene soon became animated and picturesque. After the school children had received their buns and medals they marched to the park."³⁶ Those near the front of the "thickly moving multitude of the general public, who crowded into the Park from all sides," witnessed the planting of the commemorative oak with three cheers for the Queen and the presentation of their old colors to the Volunteers, who fired a salute to end the ceremony.³⁷ A band then performed in the park during the afternoon.

In all three cities, the public had embraced the idea of a celebration which highlighted children rather than aristocrats, and which allowed them to use their own common space, the parks, to participate. Victoria herself seemed almost incidental to the concept, and new ceremonial traditions began to develop in London, Birmingham and Bath. The success of this first Jubilee made a repeat performance ten years later, in 1897, almost inevitable. Planners included more of the public in scheduled park events at the Diamond Jubilee, reflecting increased awareness of the role

played by parks in urban life. The idea of dedicating new parks to mark the Jubilee also gained popularity in 1897.

In London, the OW planted commemorative oak trees in the royal parks, Queen Victoria reviewed 10,000 schoolchildren in Green Park during a procession, and the LCC arranged a Jubilee cycling demonstration in Battersea Park, among other activities. In Birmingham, a proposal to substitute philanthropic works for a celebration led to a protest in favor of a procession and fireworks funded by public subscription. Two new Birmingham parks opened on Jubilee Day, and there were bands, a military salute and fireworks in the parks. A new park also opened in Bath on Jubilee Day, to which the town processed after a service in the Abbey. The procession then continued to Victoria Park, where Bath's schoolchildren had gathered for entertainments. The idea that such an anniversary deserved observation, that all citizens should participate, and that public parks were an ideal location for celebration, now met with broad acclaim.

Victoria died in 1901 and ended an era, clearing the way for a new type of coronation ceremony. Her unprecedented reign of 64 years meant that few Britons could really remember her own coronation in 1838. More importantly, the new ceremonial dignity and traditions developed during her Jubilees meant that the sort of spontaneous celebration at Victoria's own crowning in 1838, when a four-day helter-

skelter fair in Hyde Park dwarfed the official events, was no longer possible. When a showmen's trade journal wrote for permission to plan a coronation fair late in 1901, the OW curtly replied: "nothing in the nature of a fair or shows of any kind will be allowed in Hyde Park in connection with the celebration of the Coronation."³⁸

For Edward VII's June 1902 coronation, then, highly structured activities were planned for separate groups such as children, the aged poor and deserving maidservants, setting new standards of ceremonial organization and detail. Unfortunately, these monumental plans stumbled when Edward suddenly came down with appendicitis only two days before the coronation. He had emergency surgery, and the official ceremonies were postponed until August, moved to a Saturday to avoid interference with trade, and then pared down substantially. The question of postponing the unofficial coronation festivities, particularly those scheduled to take place in public parks, aroused considerable debate and resulted in different solutions in different cities.

In London, certain children's park fetes had already taken place, but others were postponed, and the August events, no longer in the fashionable London season, brought only small crowds to the parks. The King himself had requested that festivities in the provinces should go on as scheduled in June, but some citizens felt that this would

not show proper respect. In Birmingham, the celebrations did occur in June, though in the suburb of Harborne, the local committee agreed to carry out the festivities only after "the serious prospect of a riot" in the event of postponement.³⁹ Clearly, the public was beginning to perceive and assert its right to celebrate. Birmingham's parks, with their band concerts, certainly attracted large crowds of families that June.

In contrast to Birmingham, Bath decided to postpone most of its planned festivities, though a new park was opened with muted celebration. The confusion of the partial postponements, however, left both the public and the planners of ceremonies dissatisfied. Complaints in Bath in June about the denial of festivities to those expecting them were matched by complaints in Birmingham in August, when the coronation finally occurred, but their own celebrations had already been exhausted. It is, therefore, in the June 1911 coronation of George V that we find the flowering of royal ceremony in this period.

George V Coronation

Only ten years after Edward VII took the throne, Britain witnessed another coronation, one which again made extensive use of urban public parks. Government officials now had a firm ceremonial routine, and perhaps few of the

public, themselves also now familiar with such events, recalled their novel "invention" only twenty-four years earlier. In London, the OW planned for enormous crowds in the royal parks. So much special work was done that a ceremonial guidebook was printed for future reference. Public entertainment and public order became twin goals. New urinals and standpipes were erected, trees were protected with barbed wire, 60,000 troops were encamped in the parks, extra bands were hired, and fireworks arranged. Park gardeners planted a special flower bed at Hampton Court illustrating the King's monogram, crown and dates of birth and coronation. But to keep the parks generally accessible, permission to erect viewing stands in Hyde Park was denied to the boroughs of Marylebone and Paddington, and park gatekeepers were forbidden to hire out their lodge rooftops to spectators.

London borough councils arranged special treats for their schoolchildren in individual parks, as in previous years. Kingston-upon-Thames feted 7,000 children in Hampton Court Park, Teddington its schoolchildren in Bushy Park, and Kensington 12,000 children in Kensington Gardens. Trees were again planted in commemoration of the occasion, with pollution-resistant plane trees now substituted for the oaks the King had requested. The OW had to point out that "With regard to the London Parks ... oaks grow very badly, and

that, in consequence, planes were, with the approval of the late King, substituted at the last Coronation."⁴⁰ Not all park trees benefited from the ceremonies, however. Trees blocking views of the coronation procession were pruned to within inches of their trunks in order to allow the parks to host the thousands of anticipated spectators.

George V's coronation also coincided with a contemporary fashion for grand historical pageants dramatizing local history. Such pageants were taking place in cities all over the world, and in 1911, the Festival of Empire at the Crystal Palace Park included a pageant involving 15,000 actors who dramatized London and imperial history. King George invited no less than 100,000 London schoolchildren over twelve (about half the total, selected by lottery) to spend a day at the Crystal Palace. The Daily Telegraph and the LCC helped organize color-coded batches of children, who arrived on special trains at stated intervals, were convoyed through the attractions, then assembled to greet the King and Queen. The Times praised the LCC's organization of the festival as "like the working of a vast and complex machine ... without, apparently, a single fault."⁴¹ Each child spent six hours at the festival, regaled with lemonade, a paper-bag meal, and a souvenir cup.

While the Crystal Palace Park was closed to the general public for the day, reporters and some other adults secured

special tickets to watch the event. Several years later, one spectator still recalled the festival vividly:

Looking down on the grounds from the building the spectators saw children pouring in in a continuous torrent ...

As they marched into the grounds of the Palace a hundred thousand strong, some of the children were singing songs, others whistling tunes ... these being in all cases boy brigades - - while the girls for the most part were laughing and talking.⁴²

The Times could not decide "which was the more impressive sight, the Pageant itself or the thousands of eager children who watched it unfolding."⁴³

Press coverage of this coronation was more intense than ever, and the OW now recognized its importance by compiling an album of press cuttings relating to its coronation work. Many newspapers published ceremonial suggestions from readers, and each paper took a particular angle on the event. The Evening Standard encouraged high-minded protests about the price of procession seats, while the less indignant Daily Mirror featured cartoons lampooning excessive coronation enthusiasm, and commented:

During the last few weeks we have published, from time to time, a series of suggestions from our readers, as to how the great ceremony of the coming Coronation must be managed. The number of letters received is a remarkable proof of the vast interest this subject inspires all over the country, all over the Colonies, in every class of life. The suggestions themselves, however, are for the most part amusing rather than practicable.⁴⁴

The Daily Mail even opened a travel bureau to help spectators find accommodations in London. In this fever of enthusiasm, the Graphic puzzled: "here is a democratic people, living at a time when the spirit of Modernism, with its revolt against the old barriers of caste, is surging forward steadily;" how then could a royal coronation be so popular? The answer, according to the Graphic, lay in a combination of "the innate conservatism of English democracy" and a craving for "more colour and drama than is permitted to [the Englishman] in modern life, with its rather grey tones and drab ugliness."⁴⁵ Yet the central involvement of public space and the opportunity ceremonies offered to influence the course of public life also played a key role in stimulating interest in the coronation.

What effect did this coronation have on the London public? Londoners now viewed participation in such ceremonies as a right, as the Daily Mirror noted ironically in response to letters: "Do let us provide for everything, and for everybody either to see the show, or to be in some way substantially consoled and compensated for not seeing it."⁴⁶ Schoolchildren hoped desperately for winning tickets to the Crystal Palace event. Hordes of spectators collected along the procession route in Hyde Park and in St. James's Park, where some had slept all night to hold their places, and the pressure of the crowd caused several women

to faint. As in 1887, the press approved the crowds' enthusiasm. The Daily Mail thought: "Their conversation and their manner showed that they were regardful of the high meaning of the great occasion. The people had gathered not idly to look on at a spectacle but to bear their part in a great national ceremony."⁴⁷

The celebration of the coronation in Birmingham, as in London, focused on entertaining children. Fetes for 63,000 children took place in seven city parks, where refreshments were served and entertainment was provided by bands and by the children themselves, who offered displays of physical exercises, dancing, and pageants of empire. Saluting the flag and singing "God Save the King" also figured prominently. The Black Patch Recreation Ground opened during Coronation week, and soldiers saluted in Cannon Hill Park, while university students led a torchlight procession to the park to watch the fireworks.

Ordinary Birmingham citizens were more cantankerous. There were again protests about the enforced extra bank holiday. "Surely we have enough holidays as it is without having another one foisted on us. I am not speaking for myself but for the poor struggling artisan. ... it is about time, in this 20th century, to have done with such sickly sentimentality and humbug," complained one resident.⁴⁸ The maintenance of order, in light of the riotous Mafeking

celebrations in Birmingham, also caused concern. One correspondent, writing that "a national day of rejoicing is a severe test of the progress which the nation is making along the path of sobriety and self-control," earned a supporting editorial from the Daily Mail:

We are not on the side of the ultra-severe moralists, or of those who would impose excessive restraints upon the people in their choice of their recreations or their refreshments. At the same time, we do trust that the very real improvement in the matter of sobriety and public morals which has been achieved in recent years will not receive a serious set-back next week.⁴⁹

In the event, despite a few hitches, "Coronation Day in Birmingham was a triumphantly successful holiday," and "One of the most pleasing and enjoyable features of the local celebration was the entertainment of the school children in the parks."⁵⁰ An editorial in the Daily Mail showed that Birmingham had finally overcome its reputation as an untrustworthy city: "Birmingham, with the surrounding Midlands of course, allowed no lack of enthusiasm to sully its reputation for loyalty."⁵¹

In Bath, the 1911 coronation festivities were financed by a public subscription fund, though after some discussion the city council agreed to pay for bands in the public parks. The city proved generally enthusiastic: "Coronation dominates all public themes. No other can get a hearing. And this condition is an eminently satisfactory one. We all hope to surpass all records in our display of loyalty."⁵²

Despite a consensus, as in London and Birmingham, that children deserved priority in the coronation celebration, the question of just how to entertain them, in light of previous ceremonies, proved divisive.

At a meeting of the Children's Tea and Entertainment Sub-Committee, one member

thought they should think of the enjoyment of the children rather than of using them for providing a spectacle. ... after all, what was there for children in the spectacle of planting a sapling? To them it would not be much more than the planting of a cabbage by their fathers in the garden at home (laughter). If it were a hot day and the children were massed in the park as proposed, they would have many fainting.⁵³

This argument convinced the rest of the meeting to cancel the planned entertainment, but quick criticism followed. The Bath Chronicle argued: "In all celebrations of national importance, of which, of course, a Coronation is pre-eminently one, the aim of the promoters has always been to impress such an event on the minds of the children."⁵⁴

The Coronation Committee then asked the Sub-Committee to reconsider, one Alderman arguing that the

congregation of some 7,000 children, properly controlled by those in authority in the schools and assembled in Henrietta Park, there to sing 'God save the King,' and perhaps such a hymn as 'Rock of Ages,' would be an outstanding feature in the day's proceedings, and would live in the memory of the children and adults;

he then referred to previous ceremonial occasions when "the school children of Bath had been brought together, and to

the fact that 100,000 children are about to be massed in London."⁵⁵ The massing of children had also been controversial in London in 1887, but Bath was not to be outdone by the metropolis in this respect. Disagreeing, schoolteacher H. Sheppard remembered how

as a boy, the children's celebration of the 1887 jubilee was a toil and pain for part of the day. He also recalled what happened in 1897 ... when roughs and hooligans rushed amongst the children, few of whom saw the planting of the tree. Before half the proceedings were over he had to send his children away.⁵⁶

A compromise was finally reached, made possible because of the new parks the city had opened. The children processed to Henrietta Park accompanied only by bands, where they met the Mayor and city officials. They sang a hymn and watched the planting of an oak unimpeded, followed by a military salute, the National Anthem, a flight of balloons and refreshments (lemonade, chocolate and cake). To prevent crowding, the general public was kept out of Henrietta Park and entertained in other city parks. Bands played in Victoria, Hedgemoor and Henrietta Parks in the afternoon, and a torchlight procession to Alexandra Park was followed by a bonfire and fireworks.

In conclusion, 1911 saw the apotheosis of royal ceremonial in this period, unmarred by appendicitis and involving more and more of the public as participants with 1887, 1897 and 1902 still fresh in the public memory. Press coverage

increased to an unprecedented level in London, while ceremonial procedures were virtually codified. In Birmingham, hesitancy and concern for order were balanced by ample enthusiasm. Bath's effort to create serious spectacle now included the goal of enjoyment for all participants. Each of these ceremonial tradition showed how Britons were increasingly linked by national and imperial identities, expressing them through their use of public parks.

World War I

A third new ceremony celebrated the signing of the World War I peace treaties in July 1919; the government had refused to plan any official celebrations until this was done. A Cabinet Peace Celebration Committee was quickly convened to plan the event and, in the fear that "the British public would take the matter into its own hands and indulge in spontaneous rejoicing," to alert the nation that "National Celebrations of an organised character would take place."⁵⁷ Initially envisioned as a multi-day celebration in August, Peace Day was instead fixed for a mid-July Saturday, following

the idea which has dominated Ministers throughout of disturbing trade and industry as little as possible, while it conciliates all the seaside constituencies ... [and] this stern abbreviation of popular ebullition is thought likely to conserve the public savings in favour of the much-needed Victory Loan.⁵⁸

Yet though this left barely two weeks to make all the arrangements, and despite severe economic constraint, Peace Day was planned on a big scale. In London, it featured a lengthy procession of troops past a cenotaph erected near Whitehall to salute the King at the Victoria Memorial during the morning, and numerous entertainments in the public parks in the afternoon and evening. The recently-formed League of the Arts for National and Civic Ceremony organized participatory dancing, singing and Shakespeare so that "the British public should celebrate the day by enjoying itself in a healthy, rational and thoroughly national way."⁵⁹

Yet citizens expressed some differences with the official plans. The first controversy arose over the allocation of procession seats in the parks. Lord Curzon, chair of the planning committee, had stressed: "The whole festival should be as thoroughly democratic in character as possible. It was to be a popular celebration and not a spectacle to be enjoyed by the wealthy classes only."⁶⁰ Priority was initially given to children and wounded soldiers. Women war workers and nurses were allowed to march in the military procession for the first time, though in restricted numbers. War widows, however, were initially ignored. The committee somehow "did not consider it necessary to reserve anything for war widows as they said the bulk of them had remarried."⁶¹ Queen Alexandra, who

ceremonial which had been established over the last thirty years, and the long delay after the end of the war caused some apathy. There were also objections by those suffering economic hardship or who sympathized with unemployed discharged soldiers, many of whom wrote angry letters to the newspapers. Several trade unions refused to take any part in the celebrations on political grounds, citing the continued presence of British troops in Ireland and in Russia. The Daily Mirror advised hopefully: "the celebrations ought to diffuse a general friendliness, a common sense of things accomplished. If they do, they may be worth while; and, then ... we may set to work."⁶⁴ When the day came, many who had professed apathy slipped away to attend the festivities after all.

Public parks took on their largest ceremonial role yet. There was a procession of animals at the zoo in Regent's Park, and "The children identified themselves whole-heartedly with the Peace Celebrations, and contributed much by their methods to the gaiety of the historic occasion. ... They also delighted large crowds by their charming dancing in the parks."⁶⁵ The royal family visited Hyde Park in the afternoon of Peace Day to watch the children's dancing, organized by the Folk Song and Dance Society. The Daily Mail reported: "The royal parks were dormitory, refectory, playground, concert-hall, dancing saloon, and theatre for

hundreds of thousands. In their whole history they have never seen such crowds and such sights."⁶⁶ The Imperial Choir of Peace and Thanksgiving, with 10,000 singers, performed a patriotic concert. Despite heavy rain, thousands waited in Hyde Park to watch the fireworks that night. Inevitably, the parks suffered under all this attention. A local poet mourned Peace Day's effects on Hyde Park:

Crumpled paper, crumbs and rind
Broken bottles and orange peel,
... Flowers in agony are mute,
Mutely sobbing out their woe,
Broken, bent, bereaved, pollute,⁶⁷
Trampled 'neath a heedless boot.

The Times noted afterwards: "The gathering was almost as varied as it was numerous. It realized the democratic ideal of all classes rubbing shoulders with one another, possessed by a single aim."⁶⁸ But in contrast to the jubilees and coronations, where planners had hoped for an abstract patriotism and harmony, this festive joy was quickly directed to useful purposes. One local minister wrote: "We must get back now to work ... If we can keep alive the emotion that thrilled us on Peace Day, we shall put public service before the service of self, and so make this loved England of ours 'a country fit for heroes to live in.'"⁶⁹ This feeling was echoed in other cities. A rebuilding Britain was simultaneously rebuilding its public culture around public spaces which symbolized a new sort of commonality.

In Birmingham, the short notice given for Peace Day motivated the Daily Mail to argue: "It is of the utmost importance ... that all classes shall co-operate loyally and whole-heartedly to make Peace Day memorable in our national life."⁷⁰ It featured bands in thirteen of the city's parks and fireworks in seven, with treats for 100,000 children. The schoolchildren observed silence for the fallen, saluted the flag and sang the National Anthem before enjoying their entertainments and refreshments. A military display was initially planned but later abandoned in favor of less structured festivities, though medals were presented to three soldiers in Selly Oak Park by the Lord Mayor on his official Peace Day tour of the parks. The Post wrote in anticipation:

In a spirit of thorough loyalty and patriotism, Birmingham is preparing to celebrate to-day the conclusion of peace. It is not to be expected that the demonstrations will recapture the 'first fine careless rapture' which marked the Armistice rejoicings. Such a mood⁷¹ is not to be induced by calculated arrangement.

Afterward, though, the Gazette reported: "Birmingham celebrated Peace with great enthusiasm. The only official pageants were those in the parks, where the school children were entertained. But the absence of pageants only served to bring out the ingenuity and resource of individual citizens."⁷² Attendance figures at each of the main parks ranged from 8,000 to 13,000.⁷³ The day followed the trad-

itions of ceremonial celebration in Birmingham, though rain cancelled the fireworks:

A carnival of noise, a feast of colour and a revelry of dancing -- these are the concomitants of all periods of national rejoicing which give them a fundamental similarity. It was in this fashion that Birmingham celebrated Peace Day on Saturday. However complex may be the problems which the future holds, these for the moment were dismissed, and the whole community seemed to abandon themselves to an irresponsible gaiety as the most natural expression of gratitude for emergence from the perils of the past.⁷⁴

The festivities did not, however, include all the city's residents. As in London, some opposition surfaced. One citizen wrote angrily: "while we are fiddling Europe is starving. Much money will be spent on junketting and fireworks, every penny of which is badly needed to help this poor old war-worried world back to sanity, strength and hope."⁷⁵ The secretary of the local Trades Council asked workers to boycott the celebrations and to "reserve their energies for the demonstration which had been arranged to protest against the attitude of the Allied Government with regard to Hungary and Russia."⁷⁶ In the suburb of West Bromwich, the Trades and Labour Council refused to take any part in the celebration because of British army action in Ireland.⁷⁷

As in London, there was also a feeling that Peace Day marked citizens' readiness to restore the normal routines of life, a point stressed by all the city's papers. The

Gazette concluded: "With this celebration the last reason, or excuse, for not getting back to business with national affairs, disappears. A return to business is a stern necessity."⁷⁸ The Post commented: "now that the celebration is over, and we have formally registered our obligation to the dead and our sense of thanksgiving ... we are under the imperative necessity of girding up our loins and setting forth to the even harder battle of rescuing the nation from the threatened disasters of peace."⁷⁹ The Daily Mail pinpointed the new goals to be achieved: "Let us all, in our different spheres, see to it that we play a worthy part in consolidating the Peace and building up a better England for ourselves and for our children."⁸⁰

In Bath, the sudden decision to hold the peace celebration in July rather than in August as anticipated "caught many in a state of unpreparedness for the historic festivities," but "Although a good deal of the fervour aroused by the winning of the war has already evaporated, an exuberant spirit will certainly manifest itself on celebration day."⁸¹ The change was applauded by the Herald:

A three days' celebration would have been very expensive, it would have interfered with the seaside season, and if the fete had been relegated to August the children would have felt that they had been done out of a holiday ... no doubt everyone will have a good time, but the spontaneity of the Armistice celebrations cannot be rivalled.⁸²

A public meeting was held, subscriptions solicited, plans swiftly put on foot, and a two-day celebration arranged. On the first day, 7,000 schoolchildren would process to Sydney Gardens to sing the National Anthem, cheer the King, and enjoy tea, sports, and entertainments including Punch and Judy, dancing and a fairy play. The following day, a civic procession would march to an outdoor thanksgiving service, while Sydney Gardens would offer a garden party for soldiers and their lady guests, and the Mayor would plant a peace oak in Victoria Park, a ritual which had "generally been considered to be a feature to be observed locally in connection with national rejoicings."⁸³ Bands, dancing and fireworks would be provided in Victoria, Alexandra, Hedgemead and Innox Parks in the afternoon and evening. Finally, "an original touch is to be given to the Peace celebrations by the release of the 'doves of peace.' They will not actually be doves [pigeons apparently being more convenient], but that will not take away from the symbolic significance."⁸⁴

The same political objections as had arisen in London and Birmingham also created dissension in Bath. The local Trades and Labour Council met to decide whether or not to participate in the festivities while British troops were still in service abroad, and while no overall consensus was reached, some branches decided not to attend. In the event,

heavy rain on Saturday, just as in London and Birmingham, put a damper on the garden party. Yet the arrangements were mostly carried out as scheduled: "There were surprisingly good audiences ... it was remarkable to see the way people poured into Sydney Gardens in the evening ... very fair audiences, at the Royal Victoria Park, Alexandra Park, and Hedgemoor Park."⁸⁵ The Herald editor mused over the evolution of public ceremonies in parks in Bath since 1872:

there is one thing which has particularly struck me, and that is that the crowds largely amuse themselves, and all they require is fine weather and somewhere to go where they can rest on the grass and watch a few variety turns, listen to songs and bands, and indulge in 'dancing on the green.' There are three classes we shall all want to see specially catered for, viz., those who have 'done their bit,' the old folk and the bairns.⁸⁶

In conclusion, the celebrations at the end of World War I showed the increased importance of women and organized labor, who recognized their ability to claim a role in public culture and to symbolize it through participation (or lack thereof) in public ceremonies. The themes of work and rebuilding took equal billing with that of festivity in 1919. Tradition played a special role in this celebration, when so much of ordinary life seemed irrevocably changed. Observance of the ceremonial forms of the previous fifty years brought welcome continuity, while still allowing for changes reflecting the new British public.

Local Ceremonies

Not all park ceremonies occurred on the large scale of the three described above; the majority were smaller, neighborhood-oriented events. Many of the early local ceremonies helped establish patterns used in planning the large national events held later in the century. In London, the MBW and LCC opened numerous parks after the mid-nineteenth century, and no matter how small the plot of ground, formal opening ceremonies were always carried out. Often, small commemorative pamphlets with histories of the parks were printed and handed out at the ceremonies. 1500 tickets were issued for the opening of the first municipal park (Southwark Park) in 1869, where a procession of Volunteers, clergy, vestrymen, magistrates, members of Parliament, sheriffs, the Lord Mayor and MBW members accompanied by bands made a formal circuit of the park before speeches were given, adjourning for a "déjeuner" hosted by the local Rotherhithe and Bermondsey vestries.⁸⁷ This ceremony set the pattern for future openings. In the many cases where private groups played a role in acquiring a public park, they were also incorporated into the opening ceremony. Large crowds were usually expected, so large that when Clissold Park in North London was opened in July 1889, the plans stated: "The firing of a gun will announce the declaration."⁸⁸

These ceremonies were taken very seriously, and were invariably reported in the press, sometimes with illustrations. By 1899 there were enough of them that the LCC had to spend £42 on "a stock of flags, &c., for decorative purposes in connection with ceremonies and parks and open spaces" as well as "red baize ... as a matter of urgency."⁸⁹ A few years later, the LCC solicited bids for a pavilion awning for the same purpose. By 1904, the LCC Clerk drew up a set of guidelines for the planning of LCC ceremonies of various classes. Admission to these ceremonies was by invitation only, and carefully supervised. Police guidelines noted in 1896: "Tickets for the band-stand are red; for the inclosure around the band-stand, white ... A ticket admits a gentleman and any number of ladies, but too strict a line need not be drawn in the event of two gentleman coming with one ticket."⁹⁰ The police in attendance were given specific instructions to dress in "proper uniform with white gloves."⁹¹ Other instructions, revealing the quality of park constables, included directions to be clean and shaven, and not to get drunk either before or after the ceremony.

Birmingham began acquiring public parks in 1857, and numbered 85 by 1919. Each of these parks was opened with varying degrees of ceremony, especially formal for the earlier parks. Some openings were timed to coincide with

national events like jubilees, coronations or royal marriages. The park committee was responsible for organizing these ceremonies, and always made efforts to include the public. In 1857, Calthorpe Park "was densely crowded with a perfectly well-behaved mass of people, who evidently and properly conceived themselves to be not the least important 'assistants' at the ceremony."⁹² This recognition of spectators as key participants in these events developed further in later national ceremonies.

Cannon Hill Park, the gift of Louisa Ryland, was opened in 1873. She specified as a condition that no public ceremony be held, though the Town Clerk wrote: "I feel sure that the Council would have desired, if such a step had been in consonance with Miss Ryland's views, that a public opening of the Park, with suitable ceremony should have taken place."⁹³ However, "a large concourse of spectators" were on hand to witness the opening of the gates and receive special commemorative cards specifying Ryland's "earnest hope that the Park may prove to be a source of healthful recreation to the people of Birmingham, and that they will aid in the protection and preservation of what is now their own property."⁹⁴ 15,000 to 25,000 people visited the park on its opening day.

Birmingham opened its next two parks in 1876, Highgate Park in June and Summerfield Park in July. The opening of

Highgate Park began with the handing of the key to the Mayor [Joseph Chamberlain] by the Chairman of the park committee, who remarked that he "hoped every man and woman who came there would look upon the park as their property, and would take care to do no injury to it."⁹⁵ This concern was reiterated by the Mayor. The police band played as the group toured the park, then proceeded to Cannon Hill and Aston Parks and lunch. For Summerfield Park, "The opening ceremony on Saturday attracted a considerable concourse of people, and the occasion was noted, amongst other things, by a display of flags from a number of the houses in the vicinity."⁹⁶ This time, the Mayor requested: "Let them try to make this a place where they would exercise politeness one towards another; let them leave all roughness, and coarseness, and bad language outside the gates -- (hear, hear) -- and perhaps afterwards the good conduct exercised there might spread to the streets also."⁹⁷ These early ceremonies set the pattern for numerous later events up to the end of the period.

Bath's first park, the Royal Victoria Park, was opened by a group of private citizens in 1830, and its next park did not open for nearly sixty years. In 1887, a landslip halted work on a building site, and the Corporation decided to make the plot of land into a public park, which opened in

July 1889 as Hedgemoor Park. Its opening ceremony attracted a large crowd:

The large concourse of citizens who assembled to witness the opening of Hedgemoor [sic] Park by the Mayor and Corporation showed how deep was the interest taken in the ceremony. ... the Mayor and Corporation preceded by the mace bearers and followed by a large crowd made a tour of the ground to the band stand, where the 'opening' speeches were delivered, the addresses being interspersed with selections by the Walcot Military Band ... the Park was taken possession of by the public and a large proportion of juvenile Walcot.⁹⁸

Bath's next two parks, Henrietta Park and Alexandra Park, opened to coincide with the 1897 Jubilee and the 1902 Coronation, as described above.

In 1909, Bath designed an impressive local ceremony for the Victoria Park. This was the Bath Pageant, a series of historical scenes akin to those offered at the Festival of Empire in London in 1911. Its eight episodes represented historical scenes in Bath beginning with the Roman Empire and ending with the visit of Queen Charlotte in 1817, and employed 2,500 local actors. The pageant certainly succeeded in its goal of attracting attention to Bath, for "A large body of Pressmen from London and the Provinces visited Bath to-day for the purpose of witnessing the Pageant. ... were highly delighted with the beautiful park in which the scenes are being enacted, and expressed the opinion that no setting could be more appropriate than that chosen for the episodes."⁹⁹

The two Bath papers published numerous extracts from other British papers, one referring to the pageant as "the most important and crowd-attracting Bath has witnessed for the last 20 years at least."¹⁰⁰ The pageant was performed every day for about a week, followed each night by a "march-past" of all the performers. The final day made a great impression: "Never to the final stage of one's earthly journey is one likely to forget that last glorious picture in the Park, with the sun casting its lengthening shadows across a green sward, peopled with thousands of gorgeously attired performers and thousands more gaily-dressed spectators in a vast Grand Stand."¹⁰¹ Afterwards, the performers adjourned to Sydney Gardens for a celebratory fete.

These local ceremonies, in London, Birmingham and Bath, drew together neighbors and park managers in the same space they enjoyed on a daily basis, but with a special purpose. The intentional formality of park openings and other local ceremonies symbolized the partnership of the public and local government in the use of parks, and reflected general agreement on the importance of such public spaces in the life of the urban community.

Ceremonies, Nation and Empire

The public ceremonies discussed above clearly established a connection between celebrations of national

holidays and national identity. Such rhetoric was evident even at smaller park events not considered national occasions. When Queen Victoria arrived to open Birmingham's Aston Park in 1858, a bystander noted: "The enthusiasm was immense," and immediately thought: "the rulers of the Continent ought to read of these royal progresses in England, and profit by the lesson."¹⁰² A volunteer review in Hyde Park in 1860 by the Queen was described as a "great national demonstration of loyalty," in which the National Anthem induced in the troops "round after round of that hearty British cheering which our foes have heard so often, but the tones of which they cannot imitate."¹⁰³ Ceremonies thus provided an opportunity for citizens to reaffirm their national identity and their links with each other.

Grand occasions celebrated nationwide provided even better outlets for national feeling, especially when Continental neighbors might be impressed. Britain's historic reputation for botched ceremonies motivated citizens to improve them to match the strength of their growing empire. The Graphic commented after the Jubilee in 1887: "For once in a way England has carried out a grand national ceremony in a manner which even the most bilious foreign critic must admit to be beyond cavil," while the Daily Telegraph bragged: "The Champs Elysees or the most popular race day on the Bois never looked prettier than all the approaches to Hyde

Park and Kensington Gardens with its holiday parade of sightseers."¹⁰⁴

Coronations also provided grounds for national pride.

A magazine preview of Edward VII's 1902 coronation urged:

At the coming coronation, London will be full of visitors from abroad. Let us show them that -- like the citizens of Bruges or Antwerp -- we are capable of organizing a procession and decorations on lines as artistic as may often be witnessed in those and other continental cities.¹⁰⁵

And in 1911, as 100,000 London schoolchildren celebrated George V's coronation at the Crystal Palace without a hitch, the Times commented smugly: "Never let it be said again that the only home of ordered organization is across the North Sea."¹⁰⁶

The closer ties Britain developed with France in World War I did not diminish the ceremonial rivalry between the two countries or the role of national pride in organizing ceremonies. In December 1918, the OW Secretary received a pointed telegram: "President Wilson having offered to visit England latter part of next week Government have decided to give him greatest public reception of which London is capable STOP It should equal or exceed that of Paris."¹⁰⁷ Given only four days to accomplish this task, OW officials worked through Christmas to prepare the city with flags and other decorations, mindful of the need not to be outdone by their ally.

Preparations for the official peace celebrations in July 1919 were no less competitive. The British Ambassador in Paris was quickly notified to "find out without delay the general proposals for the decoration of the Paris streets on the occasion of Peace, or for the march of the Allied Troops."¹⁰⁸ He immediately interviewed French officials, sending details of the French ceremonial plans and their estimated cost. Not only planners saw ceremonies in parks as indicative of national identity. South Londoners objected when the peace celebration processional route was proposed for East London, since they felt "the inhabitants in that part of the Metropolis [South London] were much more British on the whole than the East End which was largely composed of foreigners," and therefore had a stronger claim on the parade.¹⁰⁹

National ceremonies also brought together representatives from various parts of the Empire, and provided opportunities for Britons at home to perceive its increasing extent as well as their links with their fellow participants. By the turn of the twentieth century, the imperial dimension of public ceremonies in parks became very noticeable. The Daily Mail remarked at the 1902 coronation that London "is feeling what it really means to be the capital of a vast Empire which includes among its sons and subjects every race and colour and creed."¹¹⁰

The Festival of Empire at the Crystal Palace Park in 1911, itself part of the developing tradition of celebrating an Empire Day holiday, offered not only the grand historical pageant mentioned above, "the most gorgeous spectacle on a truly magnificent scale," but also "the All-British Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Science" and the "All-Red Route," a train ride through a mockup world representing all the British colonies.¹¹¹

An observer of the children's coronation fete there stressed the imperial dimension in his recollections several years later, describing "the mimic railway, around the cleverly-grouped Overseas Dominions and Colonies," and quoting the King:

he remarked that "there was the crystalised desire in his heart that an object lesson could be given to the rising generation of the glories of the inheritance and the vastness as well as the boundless resources and glories of the British Empire."

How far his Majesty succeeded in his Imperial wishes who can say? But surely most, if not all, of that vast throng of vigorous, hopeful young lives will never forget taking part in what must have been one of -- if not the -- biggest gatherings of children England has witnessed.¹¹²

The Times similarly approved the children's reactions to that 1911 festival: "the hearty cheering when they passed through the various Colonial sections showed that the Empire Day celebrations have done something to encourage the Imperial idea among the children."¹¹³

Increased awareness did not necessarily mean more enlightened views of foreigners. The Morning Post mused in 1911, in anticipation of George V's coronation:

if the coloured soldiers from the Crown Colonies take part there will be ample food for curiosity, as well as loyalty and enthusiasm, for some of our West African auxiliaries are as terrible in appearance as they are childlike in ideas, and even they are surpassed in picturesqueness by the Fiji Police, coming from a land where cannibalism has not degraded a fine type of savage.¹¹⁴

The Daily Mirror then provided evidence of this attitude in action in Hyde Park when

there chanced to pass a party of our Indian visitors, in England for the Coronation. Dressed in their speckless white, with head-wrappings of delicate mauve, they made a rather conspicuous group ... and were closely followed, in a moment, by an insolently staring troop of such ignorant boobies.¹¹⁵

Clearly, the development of imperial cultural ties proceeded more slowly and unevenly than national ones. The next chapter describes how these national and imperial ideologies worked their way through other facets of park use.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both national and local ceremonies showed the development of a new public tradition centered around common use of public space. A bigger government role and more detailed planning reflected expanding national and local government during this period. At the same time, however, participation by private citizens in designing park

events illustrated the growing sense of partnership in managing public space. With each new ceremony, bureaucrats and interested citizens invented new traditions and kept better records, and the press increased its coverage.

Special treats for children and old people, bands, processions, military salutes, tree-plantings and above all, the family outing in the park, were institutionalized. The importance of parks in these events is underlined by the decision to hold most major ceremonies in the summer, when warmer weather and longer days made a pleasant day outdoors possible. Open spaces were also more flexible than buildings for public ceremonies. While the actual coronation in Westminster Abbey, for example, required excruciating attention to the exact dimensions of chairs and hangings and strict control of invitations, a park's unstructured grounds could accommodate a variety of citizens and activities without the negative associations of "the streets."

Tensions in planning these ceremonies occurred when government planners' goals clashed with the demands of various elements of the public who felt inadequately represented, and these changed with new definitions of the urban public. Throughout this period, the public community was ever present in ceremony planners' minds and in the parks. This insistent presence was new: a society which had become divided by class, gender, religion and politics had taken on

a new character as "the public." This public was well aware of its right and duty to participate in public ceremonies in public parks, and quick to demand restitution if this right seemed threatened. The mid-nineteenth century emphasis on the potential of parks for sanitary and moral improvement, with its implicit criticism of the poor, had been replaced by a goal of rebuilding society around the idea of citizenship. Parks now offered opportunities to transform British culture. A public with a passion for progress took pride in its cities, its parks and its ceremonies. In conclusion, public ceremonies in the public parks of London, Birmingham and Bath helped to create a broader public culture as well as a new ritual tradition.

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CHAPTER 6: NATION AND EMPIRE

Introduction

Public parks stimulated awareness of national and imperial identity, not only in the major ceremonies described in Chapter 5, but also in everyday park use and discourse. Parks did not originate nationalism in Britain, but they drew upon and intensified national feelings in park users and managers. Nationalism increasingly counterbalanced the divisive effects of class, gender and religion in park users, emphasizing public rather than private interests. Both private citizens and park managers employed national and imperial rhetoric to reshape the meaning of public space, just as park use subtly increased use of that language. This association meant that by the early twentieth century, parks and park activities formed key ingredients in national prestige.

The ceremonies discussed in the last chapter clearly promoted growth in nationalism in Britain, with new expressions of national identity during this period. Hobsbawm, since his work on ceremonies, has analyzed nationalism in primarily political terms, viewing a nation as "a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state."¹ Benedict Anderson also defines a nation as "an imagined political community."² Where

Hobsbawm and Anderson emphasize the transfer of power and the formation of new states, I will stress the growing cultural consensus in the already existing political nation of Britain. In the case of public parks, the "imagined community" was the imagined public of park users, made real by the defined public space of their parks. These Britons not only imagined their national community, but believed their nation to be an especially privileged community, one superior to all others.

Linda Colley has written more specifically about the development of British national identity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Drawing on Anderson's definition of a nation, she argues that "Britishness" was "superimposed over an array of internal differences," but does not see this as the result of government manipulation.³ Instead, Colley illustrates enthusiasm at the popular level: "For all classes and both sexes, patriotism was more often than not a highly rational response and a creative one as well. ... Being a patriot was a way of claiming the right to participate in British political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship."⁴ In her view, Britons seized the opportunity to redefine their political community along new lines.

None of these scholars explores the links between nationalism and public parks which emerged in several areas

by the late nineteenth century. Frequent comparisons were made of British and foreign (especially Continental) parks. These included official government missions, social reformers' campaigns to improve parks and confident assertions of British superiority by the press and guidebook authors. Some Britons painted more positive pictures than others, but nearly all revealed both a conviction that public parks represented the nation, and a desire to promote national progress through the improvement of parks.

In addition to verbal discussions, new structures and activities within public parks physically symbolized a more nationalist culture by the late nineteenth century. Innovations such as "Shakespeare gardens" (containing plants mentioned in Shakespeare's plays) as well as more traditional war memorials, flags and commemorative trees tangibly represented British nationality to park users. As Anderson and Hobsbawm have suggested, such symbols help to create perception of a national community, and national identity in Britain acquired a strong impetus from the use of public parks in this period.

The growing British Empire also influenced parks, and by turn parks familiarized citizens with the extent of the empire and its value to them as Britons. Institutions such as botanical and zoological gardens, which grew with imperial expansion and advertised imperial variety, estab-

lished themselves in many public parks. These often privately-managed gardens appealed to the public through educational natural displays and national and imperial imagery in order to justify their use of public park space. In this context, issues of public admission and control remained sensitive. Inadequate national prestige could result in a garden being ousted from a park, but successful enshrinement in the national imagination ultimately overwhelmed any individual identity. Once established in public space, these gardens became physical and cultural public property.

Most references to national and imperial issues were made in connection with London parks. There were more parks in London, including the royal parks with their obvious national associations. Most national and imperial administrators, as well as most private societies concerned with such issues, were based in the capital as well. Beyond this, contemporary writers often treated London as an embodiment of the nation. An 1857 plea for national funding for Hampstead Heath argued: "All people in every country feel their own reputation more or less bound up with that of their capital."⁵ Meath stressed the same theme in 1921, arguing: "London should be officially recognized by the Empire as its capital, so that the whole Empire may take a pride in its beautification and development."⁶

Citizens in provincial towns discussed their parks in a global context far less frequently. Bath generally had a stronger identity as a city than as part of a nation or empire, and its park comparisons were usually made with London. Birmingham also typically expressed civic rather than national pride. At the opening of its Highgate Park in 1876, a councillor commented tellingly: "the national patriotic instinct was less powerful than formerly, [so] he hoped continued encouragement would be given to the fostering of the spirit of municipal and parochial patriotism."⁷ In London, on the other hand, a growing tendency to think about public parks as part of the national character manifested itself in many comparisons of British and foreign parks. Bath and Birmingham parks will occasionally be mentioned in this chapter, but its primary emphasis must be London.

National Comparisons and National Rhetoric

National comparisons of public parks stemmed from several motives. British citizens compared their own and foreign parks to reinforce national prestige. Park authorities in different countries consulted each other about park management just as did those in different British cities. Social reformers used foreign parks to suggest changes in public parks at home. Less critically, guidebook authors

and the press engaged in ritualized boasting about the global superiority of British parks and park users. Use of nationalist rhetoric in this discourse linked the position of British public parks to the standing of Britain as a nation.

Public parks had become essential municipal amenities by the late nineteenth century, and park authorities often looked to other cities and countries for guidance in creating and running their parks. The superintending architect for London's first municipal parks compared Parisian and British royal park systems, commenting in 1869: "The [centralized] Plan adopted in Paris where the Parks are kept in the most perfect order is somewhat different, and, in my opinion, better."⁸ National prestige was explicitly involved in his efforts "to render [the London park] somewhat more worthy of comparison with that of France than it is at present."⁹ When the LCC was formed in 1889, one of the park committee's first topics of discussion was "the desirability of sending some of the head officials of the Committee to Paris ... with a view to their studying the management of Parks and Open Spaces in that City."¹⁰ The committee's chairman, Brabazon, travelled to both French and American parks for this purpose.

London's royal parks, though established much earlier, also followed developments in Continental parks. In 1893,

the OW Bailiff consulted the authorities of "other Public Parks in Europe and America" about charging for ice skating in London's parks to justify that policy.¹¹ In 1897 and again in 1903, the Bailiff was sent to Paris to consult with park authorities there, and returned with ideas for new practices in London. "The amount of pleasure they get out of their Parks and open spaces is infinitely greater than the London public get out of our Parks," he reported in 1897, and despite more amusements, "the quantities of iron railings which we find necessary, and which sadly disfigure our parks, are scarcely ever to be seen."¹² Like Brabazon at the LCC, he advised park managers to "encourage and even require their superintendents and head gardeners to go about the country as much as possible and see what is being done ... abroad, not only on the Continent but even in America."¹³

Birmingham also studied foreign parks. In 1920, the Mayor noted while opening a new public park: "There had been a discussion about sending a deputation to America from Birmingham to see how recreation problems were handled there. ... America was giving a lead in the direction of the best use of open spaces."¹⁴ When a committee was formed to examine recreation in Birmingham, its president similarly suggested "the City Council might be persuaded to send a

deputation to visit other countries in order to learn what was being done there in the matter of park lay-out."¹⁵

Foreign park authorities were equally interested in making national comparisons, and their inquiries were a source of pride for Britons. In 1871, the director of Kew Gardens reported: "I have been repeatedly applied to of late, by managers of similar institutions to these Gardens on the continent and in the colonies."¹⁶ In 1905, members of a French municipal council visited London's municipal parks, and expressed "extreme pleasure and gratification" with the LCC's reception of them.¹⁷

The earliest comparisons by private citizens were intended to stimulate the creation of new public parks in Britain. The group of citizens who founded Bath's first public park in 1830 noted: "The advantages which Shady Promenades and Agreeable Drives are to any City or Town, are too obvious to require enumeration. On the Continent, there are but few places of any eminence but what possess them."¹⁸-

In 1841, an article lobbying for more parks in London similarly noted:

The French government is now spending upon forts and walls for the fortification of Paris some thirty millions sterling, and are we to be told that Great Britain could not find the means for raising a tithe of the sum to expand in its own capital upon the infinitely more reasonable object,-- the rendering districts habitable, where elements of disease and death now aggravate the evils of poverty?¹⁹

Even in 1882, Brabazon noted: "although this Metropolis is perhaps more amply supplied with squares, gardens, and un-built-on spaces ... than many large towns on the Continent, there are foreign cities far surpassing ours in the number of such places thrown open to the mass of the people."²⁰

Other park activists, as individuals or as members of reform groups, evaluated foreign parks to justify their proposals for changes in British parks in terms of national prestige. Their criticism was often intended to stimulate progress to augment British standing in the world. As the Times put it in 1856:

One often hears the question -- 'Which do you prefer, the Bois de Boulogne or our West-end Parks?' -- and it would be no great harm if we heard these questions put still more frequently. A little healthy rivalry, in such matters between the two great capitals of Western Europe would be of immense benefit to both.²¹

Brabazon, for example, thought British parks needed more recreational facilities: "In Paris and Berlin an area has been prepared in which athletic exercises can be practised. ... [and] in some Continental cities free zoological and botanical gardens are maintained."²²

Other citizens lobbied for specific entertainments. The World approved the introduction of military bands in the parks in 1895: "On the Continent, regimental bands play in the capitals, and in all provincial towns where they are stationed, for the amusement of the people."²³ A frus-

trated cyclist lobbied for more park privileges in London the same year, arguing: "those who ride for pleasure in the Cascine in Florence, in the Bois in Paris, and in other parks in Continental towns ... have free access without the complaints of a populace who first mob them and then abuse them."²⁴

Edwin Chadwick criticized park management itself in the 1870s: "In some cities on the Continent, such as Homburg [sic], a very superior intelligence prevailed: open spaces were beautified, and the towns made pleasant. ... Unfortunately in this country the municipal government was not under the more educated, but the less educated of the middle class."²⁵ Brabazon also felt government was part of the problem: "London was and is behind, not only such capitals as Paris and Vienna, but many a provincial English town ... on the Continent many municipalities, poverty-stricken in comparison with London, own or subsidise bands whose duty it is to discourse sweet music in the open air on high days and holidays, gratis, to the public."²⁶ Yet even the more critical authors evinced a sense of pride in Britain, combined with the feeling that national progress could be hastened by following Continental examples.

Specific controversies over park use in Britain, as discussed in Chapter 3, sometimes led citizens to use arguments based on national comparisons. Both park managers

and parkgoers expressed their concerns in nationalist language, thereby making their own suggestions as well as the parks themselves matters of national prestige. A typical controversy involved "indecent" in park swimming, and both sides used national rhetoric in an effort to strengthen their cases. In 1904, the OW Secretary countered complaints about swimming in Hyde Park in national terms: "the Serpentine is not merely a sheet of water for bathing: in no other capital would ornamental water of this kind be allowed to be used for bathing at all."²⁷ Yet a 1914 complainant showed outrage that "such a condition of things as would discredit even a Continental seaside resort should be permitted in the very centre of London," in Hyde Park.²⁸

A second park conflict which took on national tones was religious. Sabbatarian groups frequently used images of the degenerate "Continental Sunday" in their efforts to close British pubs, museums and parks on Sundays. One Sabbatarian tract specifically cited:

the terrible immorality and sad homelessness behind and amid all the display of the Jardin des Tuileries and the Bois de Boulogne ... ask whether the Parisian Dimanche and ... the Parisian St. Lundi, have not much to do with the irreligion, the materialism, and the chronic unrest of that beautiful city.²⁹

A defender of Sunday liberalization even noted in 1876: "Narrow-minded sectaries ... have recklessly affirmed that the military disasters of France were assignable to her non-

observance of Sabbath sanctification."³⁰ The debate over "verminous" park users also involved national comparisons. The OW Bailiff reported in 1897 that in Paris parks,

persons of the nature of beggars or persons of disreputable appearance are forbidden to enter the Parks ... the Guards occasionally by forming a cordon make a sweep through a portion of the woods and arrest all persons who cannot establish their identity, and prove themselves to be artisans or others who earn their living.³¹

A second visit in 1903 produced a similar conclusion: "The Paris Parks are much freer from disreputable characters than are our Parks."³² Germany was also admired for its commitment to public order. The Daily Chronicle looked to Germany as a model in 1903: "a foreign visitor, especially a German visitor ... cannot understand why ground in the very centre of London should be cumbered with the most undesirable and the most undeserving of tenants."³³ The Daily Telegraph asked its readers in 1904: "Does anyone remember to have seen this kind of offensive vagrancy spreading itself over the parks of Paris or Brussels, Berlin or Vienna?"³⁴

Finally, the prospect of war and fears of national inadequacy strengthened links between nationalism and sports in public parks, and increased awareness of other countries' uses of public space. Britons who had always made cultural comparisons with Germany began to focus on physical measures as well. A doctor lobbying for public recreation in 1867 worried: "Our national progress may be permanently retarded.

... In most large towns on the Continent are public promenades better provided than in England."³⁵ Another park activist mentioned in 1885: "a necessity for all time if England is to retain her power and pre-eminence among the nations -- viz., that her children have the best facilities for indulging in their ancestral love for the games and pastimes of their fathers in the open air."³⁶

One of the most active members of this particular movement was Brabazon, who argued in 1885:

if individual energy is sapped in the mass of the population by lack of physical strength and vital power, the work of that nation will be lacking in excellence and vigour, and it will have to take a lower rank in the world's hierarchy ...

The provision of playgrounds for town children is ... one of many steps which it will be necessary to take if we wish to raise the standard of national health.³⁷

His efforts eventually led to compulsory physical exercises in British schools. This feeling was not limited to Londoners. The Birmingham Post argued in 1919, in an article pleading for more sports grounds in public parks: "there is a growing realisation among the saner elements of the community of the important part which games and manly exercises have played and will play in moulding the character of the nation."³⁸ Thus, various controversies about park use all employed national comparisons and national rhetoric, illustrating the developing consensus that parks reflected, and affected, Britain's standing in the world.

Parks as Symbols of National Greatness

These continuing comparisons in guidebooks, the popular press, and park managers' records show that Britons were aware of their position in the world, and that they evaluated their global standing in cultural as well as political and economic terms. Park publicity increasingly depended upon national and imperial language. But while some park managers and reformers hoped to use Continental parks to improve those at home, many others preferred simply to assert the superiority of British parks. For these writers, rivalry between parks in different countries stimulated a form of national pride in which public parks became symbols of the nation and its elevated position in the world.

Grounds for pride in public parks differed from city to city and from time to time, but parks were consistently identified as an appropriate vehicle for national confidence-building. An 1864 guidebook to Bath stressed the background to Victoria Park: "an architectural wonder, perfectly unique amongst the cities of Europe -- the Royal Crescent."³⁹ In Birmingham, the municipal government's initiative in providing public parks was the factor deemed worthy of international note. An 1879 park opening prompted the Mayor to assert: "The reputation of Birmingham for good government extended not only over Great Britain but the Continent. Go where they would the town was looked upon as

a great town, and they were regarded as an advanced people."⁴⁰ Even disadvantages could be twisted into boasts. In London, one journalist commenting on congestion in Hyde Park in 1911 bragged: "There is no traffic in Europe to equal this;" and another thought: "A Berlin crowd would have lost its temper hours ago; a Parisian crowd would have long since sunk down on chairs at cafe 'terraces' ... The London crowd tramps and tramps, always in good spirits and always in good humour."⁴¹ To a determined nationalist, virtually any park offered a potential contribution to national standing.

In general, though, London's royal parks contained the best material for boasting. Both the parks themselves and their users were grounds for claims of national superiority. This was not an entirely new development. As early as 1836 a chronicler of Kensington Gardens considered them "a finer specimen of Forest Scenery and Landscape Gardening, than can be found in the vicinity of any metropolis in Europe;" the superiority of trees in British parks was a theme which would recur throughout the century.⁴² The Globe similarly referred to Kensington Gardens in 1874 as "The most beautiful park in London, if not in the whole of Europe."⁴³

But by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the emphasis shifted away from individual parks and their physical aspects, to the public park system as a whole and

to its users and uses. Thus, an 1881 guide to London argued: "The Parks, Public Gardens, and Squares of London ... are not surpassed, in point of number, extent, or excellence of cultivation, by those of any other metropolis in the world."⁴⁴ A 1907 history of London's parks declared: "These natural recreation grounds are the admiration of all foreigners, and a priceless boon to the citizens."⁴⁵ The more active public community catalyzed by the opening of public parks made itself the protagonist in park narratives.

British parkgoers, especially aristocratic ones in Hyde Park, inspired national pride along with the parks themselves. An 1887 guidebook called the fashionable gatherings in the park "a sight unequalled in Europe, or, perhaps, in the world ... No such sight can be seen in any other capital in Europe which will gain by comparison with the park on a fine day in summer."⁴⁶ In 1900, a writer praised "groups of brightly dressed children with their attendants" in Kensington Gardens: "So cheerful a scene probably does not exist elsewhere in England, if anywhere in the world."⁴⁷ Even a policeman who had been stationed in Hyde Park bragged about the volume of foreign tourists in search of park Society: "visitors from all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to say nothing of America and Continental countries ... visit us annually, and all -- or mostly all -- come to Hyde Park to see Society and Fashion."⁴⁸

public parks, but who did make regular visits to parks. Conway argues: "Public parks provide space for marking local, national and international events and achievements," and cites several war memorials.⁵² Many public parks held cannon and soldiers' memorials from the Napoleonic, Crimean and Boer Wars, and new monuments were added almost everywhere after World War I. Another traditional national symbol visible in many parks was the flag. In 1909, the Bath park superintendent was directed to purchase two new flags for the parks, and in 1914 a concerned citizen wrote to suggest "the hoisting of the flag in the Henrietta Park on suitable occasions."⁵³

More innovative symbols were also important, though, and public parks themselves were relatively new introductions to urban life. The fact that many new parks named "Victoria Park" opened all over the British Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, often coinciding with Victoria's jubilees, underlines this trend. Victoria herself became an ever-stronger national and imperial symbol at this time. Trees planted on commemorative occasions such as royal jubilees and coronations blended into the landscape but still reminded parkgoers of the parks' national roles. A 1911 guidebook to Regent's Park mentioned trees there which had been planted at the 1897 Jubilee and 1902 and 1911 coronations, and quoted their identifying labels.⁵⁴

Not only royal occasions were marked by parks. The tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1864 was widely celebrated in Britain, and in Bath's Victoria Park a Shakespeare "Dell" and altar were installed. In other parks, "Shakespeare gardens," which contained plants mentioned in Shakespeare's plays, were introduced and became very popular towards the end of the nineteenth century. The LCC's park superintendent created a Shakespeare gardens in 1892 in Brockwell Park, apparently inspired by the publication of books about Shakespeare's flowers.⁵⁵ Afterwards, other London parks got them as well. Birmingham's Lightwoods Park got a Shakespeare garden in 1915, which illustrated "all the flowers and shrubs mentioned by Shakespeare in his works," and was ceremonially opened by the Lord Mayor.⁵⁶

War memorials, flags and Shakespeare gardens all reminded citizens of their national identity, and helped to make public space national space. Two other nineteenth-century park innovations, botanical and zoological gardens, went even further. As large institutions designed to educate and entertain, they stimulated local and national pride and provided a novel way to display imperial variety. Historian Lucile Brockway argues: "the new sciences of botany and zoology -- which depended on wide geographical observations ... had received great impetus in the eighteenth century from the expanding colonial activity of Great

Britain and the voyages of exploration such as that of Captain Cook."⁵⁷ Most British botanical and zoological gardens were privately run, yet located in public parks. Thus, the desire for independent management and selective admission policies had to balance against the claims of national importance found necessary to justify (usually subsidized) use of public space. Such gardens were ultimately forced either to become wholly public institutions, co-opted by their own rhetoric, or to close altogether.

Parks and Botanical Gardens

This section contrasts two botanical gardens in London's public parks, the wholly public Kew Gardens, and the privately-run but park-located Royal Botanic Society's Gardens in Regent's Park. Contemporary opinion acknowledged the important role botanical gardens played in building national pride. A gardener wrote in 1852: "Botanic Gardens, both in their present dedication to scientific purposes, and in the economical uses to which they are probably destined to be applied, may be regarded as among the most important public gardens in this country."⁵⁸ In 1877, another writer thought them "indispensable to large cities and towns ... not only delightful mediums for instruction in botanical science, but among the greatest of advantages that can be bestowed on a people."⁵⁹ In hindsight, Brockway agrees:

"Botanic gardens consciously served the state as well as science, and shared the mercantilist and nationalist spirit of the times."⁶⁰

Yet London was not a world leader in the development of botanic gardens. National pride motivated citizens to create competitive new institutions in their parks. A prospectus for a "London Botanic Institution with Gardens" in the late 1830s quoted the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling it "a disgrace" that "possessing as it did so many colonies, and such vast means of collecting botanical specimens from all parts of the earth, [Britain] should be without an extensive botanical garden," and further argued, "upon the continent not only the capitals and principal towns have their botanical gardens, but small towns and even villages ... yet the greatest city of the world has been allowed to remain destitute."⁶¹ Collecting, classifying and displaying nature, then, not only advanced scientific knowledge and provided entertainment, but demonstrated national power and prestige. These comparisons, and the fact that governments in other European nations funded such gardens, helped private botanical societies in Britain secure inexpensive land in public parks.

Kew Gardens. Kew Gardens, southwest of central London, was originally created in the eighteenth century as a private garden for the royal family. After decades of

neglect it was turned over to the state in 1841, enlarged and opened to the public in the afternoons as the "Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew." Its new mission, summarized by the director in 1859, combined "healthful recreation of the Public" with "Horticulture and Scientific Botany ... training Plant Collectors and Gardeners, for Home, Colonial, and Foreign Service."⁶² In 1923, a guidebook listed its major achievements in introducing "new and useful plants to the Colonies (e.g. the bread-fruit tree to the West Indies in 1791, quinine to India in 1860, and rubber to Ceylon and the Malay Peninsula in 1875)."⁶³

Contemporaries generally praised this role. Brockway, though she concurs that "Kew Gardens and its affiliates had an important role in empire-building by virtue of scientific research and the development of economically useful plants for production on the plantations of the colonial possessions," offers a more negative view of Kew's goals and operating methods.⁶⁴ She underlines British competition with the Dutch, French and Germans in "trying to establish botanical monopolies and to break the monopolies of their rivals."⁶⁵ She further views Kew as exploiting the third world, stressing plant smuggling and imperial labor systems. Yet Brockway never adequately investigates images of Kew at home or its impact on popular culture within Britain. Her assertion that "The display functions of the Gardens helped

to make them a popular national institution, but display functions at a botanic garden are only the outer facade for the real work of science" underestimates their importance in public life.⁶⁶

Broad public agreement certainly existed about Kew's scientific excellence, and explicit national and imperial language was almost universally employed in descriptions of Kew. The director reported in 1859 with pride: "the Royal Gardens can be considered as becoming a nearly complete National Establishment," while "18 years ago, England stood alone in having no National Botanic Establishment like Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Gottingen, Petersburg, Copenhagen, and even Stockholm."⁶⁷ An 1871 guidebook called Kew "one of the few national establishments really worthy of the nation. ... rich with rare plants, brought from all quarters of the globe."⁶⁸ In 1877, a writer declared: "Kew Gardens may be regarded as the botanical centre of the world."⁶⁹ An 1881 guidebook boasted: "Almost every known plant is to be found here, and the collections contain the rarest possible specimens."⁷⁰ Innumerable examples of this sort could be cited. Extravagant praise of Kew continued into the early twentieth century. Even in 1923, a guidebook thought Kew Gardens "rank among the most important and most beautiful botanic gardens in the world."⁷¹

2. The industrial class ... who throng the plant houses and museums in search of general or special information ...
3. Cultivators or collectors of Ferns, Orchids, Succulent Plants, &c. ...
4. ... colonists ... no class appreciates the Gardens more thoroughly ...
5. Mere pleasure or recreation-seekers ...
6. ... visitors for scientific purposes ...
7. ... botanists, and workers in science.⁷⁵

By the turn of the century, annual visitors to Kew had increased to almost three million.⁷⁶

Kew's growing popularity created some tension between the OW, Kew's independent-minded early directors, a father and son who treated the gardens as their personal fief, and its visitors. In 1872, director Joseph Hooker clashed with the OW First Commissioner, Ayrton, who tried to reduce expenditures for the gardens and exert more control over them. The dispute eventually reached Parliament, which had to determine the Gardens' role. A member of the investigative committee eventually concluded: "Ayrton's conduct put Dr. Hooker in a position not befitting his character as the head of an establishment of great & acknowledged merit in the eyes of the scientific men of Europe & to which it had been raised by the exertions of his father & himself," noting significantly, "Kew is the first botanical establishment in Europe."⁷⁷ Parliament thus affirmed Kew's national and scientific mission, and its right to some independent control.

But in 1875, only a few years later, deputations of local residents begged the OW to extend Kew's opening hours "for the admission and recreation of the public" to include mornings. The First Commissioner refused, citing potential interference with the "carrying on of the scientific treatment and training."⁷⁸ When the pleas continued, Hooker argued that the protesters underestimated "the scope and objects of the Royal Gardens as an imperial and not local institution" and insisted that they recognize Kew as "the botanical head-quarters of the British Empire and its dependencies" and "an institution of public utility" rather than "a local or even metropolitan place of recreation."⁷⁹ The Daily Telegraph defended the existing, restrictive policy because of the Gardens' "importance to the nation."⁸⁰

But the pleas were repeated in 1878 by the Kew Gardens' Public Rights Defence Association, contesting that definition of "public utility," and the First Commissioner had to decide "whether Kew should continue what it was originally intended to be -- a scientific utilitarian institution -- or merely a resort for pleasure-seekers."⁸¹ He agreed to permit early opening on Bank Holidays, when the gardens were most crowded, but it was not until 1898 that visitors were finally admitted on weekday mornings. Despite some obstacles, then, Kew developed a national scientific reputation

in conjunction with popular recreational use, and became a truly public institution. No longer amenable to one man's vision, it was transferred to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1903. Kew Gardens balanced national and international prestige in its field with diverse public uses, and successfully justified its use of public space. It continues to flourish today.

Royal Botanic Society's Gardens. A second London botanical garden formed by the Royal Botanic Society (hereafter RBS) in 1839 met a different fate. The group's charter cited "the promotion of Botany in all its branches, and in its application to Medicine, Arts, Manufactures" as inspiration for "the formation of extensive Botanical and Ornamental Gardens within the immediate vicinity of the Metropolis."⁸² It leased part of Regent's Park (not all then considered public space) for its gardens, and its first public flower show debuted there in 1843. Yet historian Guy Meynell sums the RBS up as "a record of disappointed aspirations ... little more than a public embarrassment for nearly half a century."⁸³ Competition from other botanical gardens and financial problems certainly posed problems, but the group's failure to capture public approval and to justify its use of public park space proved the fatal blow.

Despite its charter, scientific study and education actually played a minimal role in the gardens' history.

Some 800 students were admitted free in 1900 and 50,000 cut specimens distributed to schools, but Meynell points out that the RBS had "no scientific ambitions, no overseas collectors and no intention of undertaking research."⁸⁴ Though located in Regent's Park, the RBS gardens were open only to fellows, members, and invited guests, with few exceptions, for more than fifty years. The gardens thus became a fashionable place for flower shows, promenades and concerts, patronized by the royal family and aristocrats during the Season. An 1871 guidebook noted: "The society was incorporated in 1839 for the promotion of botany, but its principal attention is directed to making the gardens an agreeable rendezvous for the gay world."⁸⁵ Social display took priority over scientific progress.

Contemporary books and articles underline the gardens' primarily social function. During the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Illustrated London News announced that members could admit "four persons daily instead of two, which is a great concession, as the gardens are maintained as a select promenade."⁸⁶ Club rooms and restaurants, and later ice skating, tennis and croquet, were added to facilitate socializing over the years, and members could also hold private garden parties there. A typical fete in 1881 was attended by "a large and fashionable assembly of ladies and gentlemen in evening dress," including some royalty, with their

costumes carefully illustrated in the press.⁸⁷ Later in the century, special fetes were introduced just for children.

Yet despite these fashionable amusements, the gardens' popularity slowly began to wane. As Meynell points out, "from its earliest days, the society depended very largely upon its attractions for polite society," and this dependence left it vulnerable to competition with new forms of entertainment.⁸⁸ Membership declined, and by the 1890s quarterly reports expressed concern with recruiting new members. As one writer explained the problem: "The time for merely well-kept lawns and artificial water and a few masses of bright flowers, which was all the public asked for in the Sixties, has gone by."⁸⁹ At the same time, the OW began acting on public criticism of the society's use of what was now viewed as public park space. Not only individual citizens but even the LCC urged incorporation of the RBS gardens into the park. Partly in response to government pressure, the RBS started to admit the general public twice a week for 2s.6d. each as an experiment in 1895.

The more open admissions policy enabled the RBS to renew its lease in 1901, but the group's problems only grew worse. By 1905, the public were admitted three times a week, for a lower fee, but at a meeting that summer, the RBS vice-president complained about increasing tension between

public and private interests in the garden. He tried reconcile national importance with social exclusivity, stressing "the number of important social functions which took place in the Gardens, and the public utility of many of them," and concluded: "it would be difficult to find another society which had done more for the great interests of the United Kingdom."⁹⁰ Yet when one member suggested advertising to attract the public, he countered: "there were many Fellows who thought the Gardens were made too public ... The duty of the Council was to try to unite the two things: to reserve the Gardens as far as possible for the use and enjoyment of the Fellows, and at the same time do something for the public."⁹¹ By this time, about a quarter of the society had formed a private "club" within the society to maintain exclusivity.

The RBS gardens also posed a dilemma for the OW, which received complaints about such privileged uses of public parks. How best to serve the public, by making the land truly public, or by allocating it to a private group claiming to enhance the public interest? In 1919, with another lease renewal approaching, a committee of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, which then managed Kew, suggested that the RBS make the gardens more useful to the public

both from the scientific and educational point of view by the establishment of

- (1) A School of economic Botany ...
- (2) ... a centre for research ...
- (3) A centre for teaching in Horticulture ...
- (4) Courses in "School Gardening".⁹²

When the society declined, an official pointedly questioned "whether land situated in such an admirable position in a public park ... should be utilised for the purposes of the Botanic Society, with its prominent social side, or utilised for the benefit of the public as a whole;" he found the "educational & scientific side is not at all prominent. In fact a notice is displayed at the Entrance warning students & teachers that they must leave the Gardens by 3 pm!"⁹³ Protests continued on both sides for several years.

Ultimately, the OW gave priority to anticipated "general public satisfaction with due expression in the Press" if the land were returned to the park, and decided in 1928 not to renew the RBS's last lease.⁹⁴ As Meynell notes, the RBS "could only hope to continue there if it could satisfy a worthwhile public need, as the Zoological Society had succeeded in doing with the Zoological Gardens."⁹⁵ Public parks had gained a position of such public and national visibility that privately-run park institutions had to demonstrate their right to occupy park space in convincing national or imperial terms. Unlike Kew, the RBS never achieved such national renown, nor did it come to grips with the need to court popular support. Its gardens closed in

1931, and now (with a few alterations) form the Inner Circle of Regent's Park.

Parks and Zoological Gardens

Like botanical gardens, zoological gardens faced the challenge to become national park institutions. The Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park managed to achieve international scientific renown, national prestige and unprecedented public popularity despite private control and their location in a public park. Brockway argues: "The founding of the Zoological Society of London illustrates the interconnection of imperialism and science even more pointedly than in the case of the botanic societies," and the zoo took care to keep that relationship prominently displayed throughout the nineteenth century.⁹⁶

The Zoological Society of London's prospectus clearly emphasized national competition as a motive:

In almost every other part of Europe, except in the Metropolis of the British Empire something of the kind exists; but though richer than any other country in the extent and variety of our possessions, & having more facilities from our colonies, our fleets, & our varied & constant intercourse with every quarter of the globe ... we have as yet attempted little and done almost nothing.⁹⁷

Its zoological garden opened in 1828 in Regent's Park to more than a thousand members and their guests. A later zoo official commented of the 1829 membership list: "there were

not many people of distinction in the country at that time who are not to be found in it."⁹⁸ With its royal and aristocratic sponsorship, the zoo quickly became a part of London Society life. Public access remained restricted for two decades, while the zoo "became widely regarded as a kind of exclusive preserve for people of fashion, most of whom, it seemed, knew and cared little about animals."⁹⁹ Zoo historian Wilfred Blunt quotes an 1869 columnist who complained that the zoo was

looked on simply as one of the usual social markets where young ladies are exposed "for sale," and where people greet each other with what Thackeray called the most affectionate animosity, and exchange criticisms on the dress of the period. ... the story goes that a lady of fashion recently said to her companion, "What a charming place the Zoo would be if it weren't for the animals!"¹⁰⁰

But in a crucial turn, and in contrast to the RBS, the zoo's restrictive admissions policy quickly disappeared. After 1847, the public were admitted every day but Sunday on payment of admission fees (a penny on Mondays, designed to attract workers, a shilling other days), while students and artists were admitted free. Historian Ann Saunders notes that the term "Zoo," probably drawn from a music hall song, became popular around 1867, reflecting the development of a larger constituency.¹⁰¹ So many Londoners made a habit of visiting the zoo that in 1876, a government proposal to give the zoo more park land in exchange for free admission to the

zoo one day a week was rejected. The society feared that "the gardens would not contain the crowd who would avail themselves of the privilege of gratuitous admission."¹⁰²

Yet the zoo continued to play a social function for the upper and middle classes. Mr. Wharton in Trollope's The Prime Minister was dismayed to find that his daughter had been on an outing to the zoo with a suitor he found objectionable. Sundays were still reserved for members, while workers visited mainly on Mondays. Galsworthy described a day in the 1880s in The Man of Property:

There had been a morning fete at the Botanical Gardens, and a large number of ... well-dressed people who kept carriages -- had brought them on to the Zoo ...

"Let's go on to the Zoo," they said to each other; "it'll be great fun!" It was a shilling day, and there would not be all those horrid common people.¹⁰³

Yet also in attendance was young Jolyon Forsyte, a social outcast, who watched the crowds awaiting the tiger's feeding, and criticized the "barbarous" ideas of the "old school, who considered it at once humanizing and educational to confine baboons and panthers."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Jolyon's two children left the gardens in a state of "blissful delirium," and he would clearly return.

Paralleling its role in popular culture, the zoo's sense of a national mission continued to grow. An 1834 letter angling for rent remittance urged this definition: "a Society so national in its objects and in its mode of

promoting them, and so adopted by the Public, by the Government and by the Crown, is not undeserving of an extension of the national favor in its behalf."¹⁰⁵ Another letter in 1868, lobbying for more space in Regent's Park, boasted that the zoo "now contains by far the largest and most complete series of living animals in existence," and argued that in

many continental States such collections are either kept up at the public expense altogether, or are liberally assisted from the public purse. It may be therefore fairly urged that the Zoological Society of London are performing a public duty.¹⁰⁶

National comparisons continued to motivate zoo expansion and reforms well into the twentieth century. An attempt to gain more park land in 1911 cited "the improvements wh. have been made lately in the similar gardens of various cities in Europe," and a subsequent proposal for new terraces within the zoo obtained approval from the OW as part of "the desire of the Council of the Zoo to provide means for showing some of the animals to the public in their natural surroundings, so as not to drop behind such countries as Germany, Belgium, or the United States."¹⁰⁷

Their efforts met with substantial public acclaim. The zoo quickly became prominent, and, at least in the minds of Britons, surpassed its Continental rivals, serving as a model for zoos elsewhere in Britain. By 1851, the Illustrated London News awarded the zoo "a degree of beauty and reputation which has never been exceeded either in its own

history, or by any of the kindred institutions on the Continent."¹⁰⁸ An 1898 guide called the zoo "a collection (the largest in the world) of living wild beasts, birds, and reptiles. ... the best place of rational and instructive open-air amusement to be found in London."¹⁰⁹ A 1902 guidebook noted: "Although the Zoological Gardens are the property of and entirely managed by the Zoological Society, they practically contain the National Collection of Living Animals, which is second to none in the world."¹¹⁰ As with Kew, national language very frequently colored zoo descriptions.

The zoo's role as model of imperial diversity was quickly seized upon. An 1880 review of the world's parks disparagingly concluded: "Germany has no colonies, and ... Berlin, though now the capital of a great empire, has neither menagerie nor botanical garden ... on the scale worthy of an imperial city."¹¹¹ A 1902 guide argued of the London zoo: "Here are collected the most comprehensive assemblage of animated nature in the whole world, and where the different animals and tribes of animals, instead of being confined in wooden cages ... live, and thrive, and multiply almost as freely and certainly as in their native homes."¹¹²

The zoo's growing collection and reputation came partly from royal gifts made by monarchs returned from visiting

British colonies. The Illustrated London News noted in 1851: "many of the most valuable animals in possession of the Society are the gift of her Majesty the Queen."¹¹³ Edward VII (while Prince of Wales) brought back a group of almost 150 "beasts and birds" including elephants, tigers and leopards from India in 1876, necessitating the construction of a new building and attracting 900,000 visitors to the zoo that year.¹¹⁴ George V (also while Prince) did the same in 1905 and again in 1912, then attracting a million visitors.¹¹⁵ Yet an 1895 book about the zoo noted that gifts of animals came not only from monarchs but also "donors of all ranks and conditions, from the Queen ... to the public-school boy with a taste for natural history," underlining popular support for the zoo.¹¹⁶

Even London's municipal parks became donors to the zoo. When in 1872 the superintendent of Finsbury Park reported: "a Gull which had been placed on the Ornamental Water ... had been devouring the eggs and attacking the young water-fowl," the committee quickly resolved "That the Gull be presented to the Zoological Society with the compliments of the Board."¹¹⁷ Following this useful precedent, the LCC resolved in 1893: "That the donor of the comorant [sic] now in Clissold-park be informed that, owing to the habits of the bird, the Committee are unable to retain it in any of its parks, and be asked whether he would wish it to be

returned to him or would consent to its being transferred to the Zoological-gardens."¹¹⁸

All these additions naturally helped the zoo to prosper, and at the same time stressed the value of empire to the general public. References to it often mentioned its colonial sources. The Illustrated London News proudly referred to the capture of the zoo's new hippopotamus in national and imperial terms:

Fifteen hundred years had passed since an animal of this remarkable form had been seen in Europe ... More than one European power has possessions in Africa where this almost fabulous animal yet lingers; but ... no serious step had ever been taken by any of these Governments ... A self-supporting Society ... has not only succeeded in raising itself to the character of a truly national Institution, but has succeeded in effecting much more than the cognate Institutions of other countries, supported by their respective Governments.¹¹⁹

An 1899 guide to the zoo recounted the exciting histories of some of the zoo's animals in more detail.¹²⁰

The zoo's popularity inspired the LCC to develop grander ambitions for itself and its parks than that of occasional donor. In 1891, the parks committee considered rabbits, goats and elephant and camel rides in the parks, and decided to introduce goat chaises for the 1892 season.¹²¹ Meath also wanted to expand the provision of zoos in municipal parks to "encourage an intelligent study of natural history amongst classes who have neither the time nor the money to visit the private gardens of our Botanical and

Zoological Societies in Regent's Park."¹²² By 1899, the LCC's animal program was doing so well that an offer of a swan and some cygnets from the OW had to be refused, and later that year some birds were donated to other cities.¹²³

A suggestion by the MPGA in 1901 that the LCC should open "small zoological collections" at parks was rejected, but apparently sparked an idea which matured later.¹²⁴ In 1905, the parks committee solicited donations of deer and kangaroos for a proposed zoo, and several months later Walter Rothschild presented the LCC with two emus, two kangaroos, and two rheas, which were installed at Golder's Hill.¹²⁵ A bear was apparently added later, but the mini-zoo must not have been a success. A controversy erupted in 1911, when a petition with more than a thousand signatures unsuccessfully asked the LCC to keep the bear at Golder's Hill, and the following year the chief officer was ordered to "dispose of" two emus, a kangaroo and a wallaby.¹²⁶

The zoo had its own troubles as well. Like the RBS gardens, the zoo occupied what was perceived as public space in Regent's Park, and its presence there and continuing efforts to expand caused some of the same controversies. An article in the Times in 1911 identified the problem: "Though the Zoological Society performs a national work, in actual constitution it remains a private society."¹²⁷ Underlining the zoo's role in British national standing, the society's

president commented in 1887: "The collection and exhibition of rare and little known living animals has long been a subject of interest and instruction in civilized communities, and in many countries either the State or the Sovereign has considered it as part of their duty or privilege to maintain a more or less perfect establishment of the kind."¹²⁸ Yet the zoo's educational functions sometimes seemed inferior to the fun it supplied. A journalist complained in 1896: "Thousands of visitors walk through the Gardens and come away from them with feelings of wonderment, but with no solid gain in the way of information. ... the Zoological Society does nothing to make its magnificent Gardens a real source of public instruction," and advocated a course of free popular lectures.¹²⁹

The zoo's relatively cheap admission certainly attracted a broad crowd. By 1852, "these gardens have been among the most popular places of amusement that have lately come into vogue."¹³⁰ The line between the zoo and the park became less absolute as well. A 1907 addition was permitted on condition that the animals be visible to non-paying parkgoers through the boundary fence. By 1910, there were almost 600,000 visitors a year. In 1911, the superintendent of Regent's Park commented: "Regent's Park is, perhaps, better known as the home of the 'Zoo' than one of the Royal Enclosures, indeed for the former it is one of the principal

attractions to the thousands who flock to London during the holiday season."¹³¹ The zoo had become an institution in both London and national life.

The press fed curiosity about the zoo with frequent coverage and illustrations of new additions, births and deaths in the zoo. The most popular animals were given names, like Jumbo the elephant, whose 1882 sale to an American circus caused a public outcry.¹³² Visitors to the zoo not only watched the animals, but fed them (sometimes against the rules) and, if children, rode them. A 1901 children's guidebook to London featured a trip to the zoo to watch the animals being fed and ride the animals, "for it would never do to say we had been to the 'Zoo' and had come away without a ride on the elephant."¹³³ Another author asked rhetorically: "What London child has not spent moments of supreme joy mingled with awe on the back of the forbearing elephant? And there are few grown persons who do not share with them the delight of an hour's stroll through the 'Zoo.'"¹³⁴

Particular attention was paid to dramatic incidents at the zoo. In 1851, a thirteen-foot boa constrictor swallowed a blanket, afterwards giving "indications of internal uneasiness," but finally spat it back out and made a full recovery.¹³⁵ In 1866, a practical joker issued tickets for an April Fool's Day parade of the zoo animals, and the

police had to be called in to subdue hundreds of angry ticket-holders.¹³⁶ In 1894, an elephant escaped and "spent an afternoon in rambling about the suburbs of North London," while in 1913, an orangutan escaped and built a nest in a nearby tree.¹³⁷ During the 1919 peace celebrations, the zoo featured a "Great march of elephants, camels and llamas, beflagged and carrying those children who arrive early to secure seats."¹³⁸

The zoo drew attention in novels just as it did in the general press and with the public at large. Nor was it used just to illustrate upper-class social life. Richard Altick, citing mentions by Dickens, Collins and Emily Eden, argues that the zoo's topicality for novelists rose with its growing collection of animals and increasing popularity with the public: "Novelists found the animals and the people who gazed at them especially useful when they needed metaphors to describe some form of human body language."¹³⁹ An 1859 etiquette book compared middle-aged ballgoers to the zoo's boa-constrictor: "Both he and they like to be fed."¹⁴⁰ In Collins' Armadale, Lydia Gwilt used the snake to describe another character: "Did you ever see the boa-constrictor fed at the Zoological Gardens? They put a live rabbit in his cage, and there is a moment when the two creatures look at each other. I declare Mr. Bashwood reminded me of the rabbit."¹⁴¹ In Trollope's Phineas Finn, the unhappy Lord

Chiltern refused to go to the zoo: "People would look at me as if I were the wildest beast in the whole collection."¹⁴² These references show the role played by the zoo in city life.

The zoo successfully presented itself as a public institution of national and imperial importance, one justified in occupying public space, yet also retained limited private privileges (the Sunday admissions) for its members. Its ability to draw on national and imperial rhetoric combined with broad public appeal ensured its success in popular culture and as a public park institution. Only in the last few years have the zoo's ever-increasing ambitions, and correspondingly larger demands for park land, brought it to a terminal conflict with the government and public, and it now seems likely that it will close.

Conclusion

The use of public parks helped to create a new public culture with national and imperial overtones as well as civic roots. Public parks familiarized citizens with the idea of public space, and debates about park use allowed them to participate in the functioning of their "imagined" public community, a community increasingly defined in national and imperial terms. The rise of the British Empire during this period, and the associated rhetoric of Britain's

global superiority, encouraged expressions of these feelings and the creation of new public institutions to represent them.

Two specific types of public park institutions, botanical and zoological gardens, attempted to mix private and public interests with the use of public space in this increasingly nationalistic climate. Both Kew Gardens and the London Zoo proved able to deploy national and imperial ideology effectively, and despite some tensions, managed long survivals as park institutions. The Royal Botanic Society, on the other hand, succumbed to the demands of a public which no longer perceived its garden as an appropriate use of their public -- and national -- park. Thus, both parkgoers and park institutions were affected by the national framework increasingly used for discussions of public space, with private identities receding in importance before the concept of the public.

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CHAPTER 7: WORLD WAR I

Introduction

By the turn of the twentieth century, public parks had acquired a prominent place in public culture and in the habits of daily life in Britain's major cities, but the outbreak of World War I imposed sobering and unprecedented changes. A nation at war demanded more from its public spaces in the areas of military training, financial and human resources, and food production. While the British army had occasionally used parks for drilling or ceremonies during the nineteenth century, the Great War moved military park use onto a whole new scale. Vast numbers of soldiers drilled and camped in the parks as national needs took precedence over individual and civic agendas. Privileges which had been painstakingly acquired by different groups of park users were suddenly upset. National and local park authorities faced curtailed park space as well as drastically reduced staffs and budgets. More intense competition developed for scarce sports grounds, while flower gardens gave way to vegetable allotments and livestock.

Yet citizens with long-standing leisure habits in parks continued to rely on these spaces for relief from the war effort. Throughout World War I, urban public parks were forced into a dual role, paralleling the gap between

soldiers and civilians. The identification of parks with the state of the nation, developed as discussed in the last chapter, allowed more than one interpretation of their proper function in wartime. Some citizens demanded displays of patriotism and military preparation in the parks, while others continued to cherish parks as pastoral retreats and centers for leisure activity. In the aftermath of the war, each group of park users struggled for priority, and no easy return to prewar park practices seemed possible.

World War I, while an important event in the history of parks, has played little role in studies of parks. Conway mentions the installation of military memorials in parks, especially following the Crimean War in 1856, which she views as "overt examples of imperialism."¹ However, she does not discuss the wartime use or management of public parks, and memorials were, after all, only footnotes to the war itself. Cultural historians, many of whom picture the war as a watershed for British society and culture, have offered more extensive commentaries on the effects of the war on public life. Again, however, they do not reach any overall consensus, and mostly ignore the issue of changes in the use of public space.

Paul Fussell's discussion of civilian life in wartime London does include "the famous exhibition trenches dug in Kensington Gardens for the edification of the home front,"

which soldiers found very unlike actual trenches on the Western front.² He uses these model trenches as a metaphor for the gap which he argues developed between the hopeful (or at least propagandized) home front, and soldiers unable to absorb the horrors of the real trench experience. Stephen Kern, on the other hand, stressed commonality. He discusses how the advent of World War I imposed "coordination of all activity according to a single public time," a new cultural simultaneity which levelled "class, rank and nation."³ Newly important public spaces now served the nation, while also serving as battlegrounds for a rebuilding public culture.

This chapter will first present a brief summary of military park use in the years before World War I. It will then explore the ways in which public park use in London, Birmingham and Bath changed during the war, stressing parks' dual role of representing the war and offering refuge from it. Finally, the reactions of the military, park authorities and park users after the war ended, and the war's consequences for public life, will be examined. World War I proved a difficult challenge to the new, consensual public culture which had developed around parks in the late nineteenth century, and caused significant realignments within that culture. But the very fact that public park use led to such vigorous debate during the war shows how

residents near the Knightsbridge Barracks in Hyde Park unsuccessfully petitioned the OW to remove the barracks, arguing that they "defile and vitiate this neighbourhood" and "encourage a number of dirty, slovenly, and unsightly shops, and many houses of a worse character."⁴ The First Commissioner was sympathetic, but had no power to oust the army from the park. Meanwhile, military outrage in response to this campaign inspired more than a thousand Londoners to sign a petition to keep the barracks for financial and strategic reasons. Military use of London's municipal parks occurred less frequently, but often enough so that the MBW added a clause to the 1872 bye-laws proposed for Hampstead Heath preventing interference with persons "exercising as Volunteers".⁵ 1902 LCC bye-laws additionally prohibited unauthorized "drilling or practising military evolutions, exercising as volunteers or using arms without the consent of the Council."⁶ No barracks or other permanent military structures were erected in municipal parks before 1914, however.

An increase in military activity during the Boer War from 1899 to 1902 led to a more vehement debate over the use of parks for drilling, in the press and in the House of Commons. The OW First Commissioner defended his policy of limiting military use of Richmond Park since "The park is maintained out of moneys voted by Parliament for the general

enjoyment of the public," and manoeuvres "would entirely destroy the amenity of the Park and greatly interfere with the rights and privileges which the Public had so long enjoyed."⁷ The OW was defended by the Pall Mall Gazette, which cited the "manifest inconvenience" that would be caused to the "many who ride, drive, bicycle, or walk about [the park], especially on Saturdays."⁸

On the other hand, the Spectator called the restriction "a crime against the nation," and implied that the real reason for the OW's limiting military park use was more sinister: "the risk of disturbing the game preserved in the Park," which the OW had stated to be at risk.⁹ Readers contributed letters on both sides of the debate. In Richmond, handbills warned residents of the dangers of greater military privileges, and a deputation called on the OW to underline their concerns. In the end, the government reluctantly agreed to make more (though not all) of the park available for military drill. This debate established a framework later used for discussions about park use in World War I, when national needs would again contend with leisure for the general public in parks.

Military use of the municipal parks also increased during the Boer War. An old house and gardens in the Gold-er's Hill section of Hampstead Heath were turned into a convalescent home for wounded soldiers, and recruiting notices

were posted. After the war ended, the LCC displayed a captured gun in the Victoria Embankment Gardens.

Permission for soldiers to drill in all London parks gradually expanded in the years after 1902, and soldiers also gained more privileges to play sports and (to a lesser extent) stage ceremonies within parks. A former Hyde Park policeman recalled in 1909:

Saturday evenings during the months of May, June and July are occupied by the different corps in their Inspection Battalion drills ... Business being practically over for the week, a great number of people flock to the Park to see the Volunteers drill.¹⁰

The Boer War accustomed the public to greater military use of London's parks, and concern for national strength outweighed periodic opposition from park authorities and civilian park users.

In Birmingham, Calthorpe Park quickly became a focal point for local Volunteer drills. In 1861 the Calthorpe Park Sub-Committee reported: "The Park has been an accommodation to the gentlemen of the voluntary Rifle Corps at times of drill and review and being so near the Town thousands of persons with but little loss of time have been able to attend and witness the Military evolutions."¹¹ Conflicts did not occur until 1868, when cricket was introduced into the park. The park committee then divided the park into two halves, one for the general public and one to be shared by cricketers and Volunteers, a step which

reduced but did not eliminate squabbles. Military salutes were sometimes fired to mark the Queen's birthday in Aston and Calthorpe Parks, and Calthorpe Park was often used for military reviews during royal ceremonies.

As in London, the advent of the Boer War inspired new displays of patriotism in the Birmingham parks. Two old Russian cannon, which had been donated to Calthorpe Park after the Crimean War but had been lying half-abandoned on the ground since 1883, were remounted in 1899. Volunteers were given extended drill space in the parks, allowed to pitch tents there, and after the war a memorial to fallen Birmingham soldiers was erected in Cannon Hill Park. With the generally accommodating attitude of Birmingham park authorities, Birmingham largely escaped the sort of complaints about military use of the parks which arose in London, perhaps because military use was generally confined to one park in Birmingham.

Bath park authorities made little mention of military use of the town's parks during the prewar period, probably because open space was readily available near the town. Even the Boer War apparently did not stir up any unusual military activity in Bath parks. In 1910, the Corporate Property Committee declined an offer of ornamental guns from the Army Council. These, then, were the prewar conditions in parks in London, Birmingham and Bath. The outbreak of

World War I radically changed the practices and compromises which had been established between the military, park authorities and general park users.

Parks and the War Effort

Virtually as soon as war was declared in August 1914, Britain's public parks showed visible changes. Many citizens supported these changes wholeheartedly. Most expected the war to be a short one, so initially park concessions were granted cordially and without much concern. Most notable was the ubiquitous drilling and camping of soldiers and new recruits. Yet with sharply reduced budgets and staff, national and local park authorities also faced difficult decisions about priorities in park use. The declining food supply sparked a third change, the institution of allotment gardens in parks.

Soldiers in the Parks. From the outset of the war, public parks were clearly acknowledged by all parties as important elements in the war effort. While the Army Council ordered in August 1914 "That the ordinary avocations of life and the enjoyment of property will be interfered with as little as may be permitted," its power to appropriate property and labor soon transformed citizens' ordinary enjoyment of parks.¹² Recruiting rallies, farewell services and military reviews supplemented traditional holiday

festivities. Punch featured essays recounting soldiers' adventures while training in public parks.

In London, the OW immediately received military requests for "aeroplanes to be stationed in the Royal Parks, probably either in Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens, for the defence of London from aerial attack," as well as "permission for all the Territorial Force Units now being raised in London to have the use of the Royal Parks for drilling."¹³ The LCC granted permission for drilling "at all places where suitable ground is available" in its parks by October.¹⁴ These privileges quickly made the war visible in public space. By August 17, the Times reported: "Most of the public parks are being used by the War Office, and on Saturday afternoon thousands of the public watched the recruits at drill. ... many who came merely as spectators remained to enlist."¹⁵

Diaries of regiments stationed in London record training sessions in Hyde Park, Regent's Park, Victoria Park, Battersea Park and Hampstead Heath, among others. A Birmingham soldier wistfully recalled his training there:

In Battersea Park we dashed about with stretchers and bandaged the imaginary wounded before the eyes of wondering children. Then Bert and I, scintillating from boots to brow, swaggered off to the West End with little canes and carried out voluntary parades round the bandstand in Hyde Park.¹⁶

Hampstead Heath, a traditional Bank Holiday destination, now featured trenches and a cannon atop Parliament Hill as well as swings and coconut shies. Early in the war, then, the parks already hosted numerous soldiers, and the number increased as time passed.

The soldiers' training went beyond marching. One new practice, in parks as well as the Western Front, was trench digging. The OW Secretary recorded requests in November 1914 for "permission to practise digging trenches in the Royal Parks," and agreed that "The First Commissioner and I are both anxious to do everything we can to help the military in this matter, and I have already given leave ... on the condition that they fill up the trenches before they leave the district."¹⁷ The army was "very grateful indeed to you for the concession you have made as regards digging in the parks and elsewhere," and no tension was yet evident.¹⁸ But the eagerness of troops in digging trenches led to some complaints. Only a few months later, the OW sent a stiff reminder: "There have been cases where the digging has been allowed to approach some of the trees within a few feet, thereby causing damage to their roots."¹⁹ Kensington Gardens was temporarily withdrawn from the army, but permission to dig trenches there was re-extended in May 1915.

The model trenches dug at Kensington Gardens attracted so much attention that they became what the Times called "the most exciting part" of the Active Service Exhibition, opened in March 1916 by the Daily Mail to benefit the Red Cross and the Order of St. John.²⁰ This exhibition was a great success, extended from its intended closure in April until July. But though advertised as "realistic representations of the actual conditions," and constructed by veterans of the Western Front, the model trenches featured unrealistic cleanliness, roominess and ample furnishings, and exited into "a lounge, where a number of ladies will serve tea."²¹ War poet Wilfred Owen described them as "the laughing stock of the army," and another soldier "found he had never seen anything at all like it before."²² Such trenches, intended to educate, instead helped to create a gap between civilians and soldiers.

The army also erected numerous "temporary" buildings in public parks, some of which remained for years after the end of the war. In London, these included anti-aircraft stations, a camouflage school and balloon stations as well as miscellaneous office buildings and camps. In the suburban royal parks, anti-aircraft stations and balloon stations were supplemented by an experimental bombing ground in Richmond Park. Both royal and municipal parks hosted these buildings. In March 1915, the Times noted: "On the whole

the squares and parks and open spaces of London remain wonderfully unchanged," but it cited St. James's Park, Regent's Park and the Inner Temple Gardens as already damaged.²³

A different sort of military building was established in Regent's Park, where one park villa housed a hostel for soldiers and sailors blinded by mustard gas. In 1917, "owing to the continued increase in the number of blinded soldiers," the hostel had to be enlarged, and the OW agreed "In view of the enormous importance of the work being carried on."²⁴ Yet as the war bogged down, the military took more and more of the parks, provoking increased reluctance from park authorities and further changing the appearance of the parks. Civilians' enthusiasm for the parks' role as exemplars of the war effort began to wane.

In Birmingham as in London, the outbreak of war dramatically increased the number of soldiers drilling in the parks. An "Athletes Volunteer Force" composed of "Doctors Solicitors and other professional men, Manufacturers and Wholesale Jewellers and other Manufacturers" drilled in Handsworth Park, assuring the park committee that "every precaution will be taken to see that the privilege is not abused."²⁵ In July 1916, the Women's Volunteer Reserve was granted permission to drill in Cannon Hill Park three times a week. Smaller companies drilled in smaller parks,

like one formed at the local Avery works which met in the Black Patch Recreation Ground. Recruiting meetings were also held in the parks.

On the whole, Birmingham citizens, like Londoners, supported military use of their parks in the early part of the war. One made a suggestion "to drill all men at present passed and receiving pay for same in the open public spaces or recreation grounds instead of waiting for training grounds ... Think what a fine incentive it would be for recruiting."²⁶ A 1915 volunteer review in Cannon Hill Park "was witnessed by many thousands of spectators," and considered "a complete success."²⁷ In 1917 medals were presented to several wounded soldiers there, and by 1918 a specific area of Summerfield Park had been allotted to convalescent wounded soldiers "for physical exercise and recreation."²⁸ Only in 1918 did the park superintendent complain of "considerable trouble with the Officer in Charge of the Balloon Section of the R.A.F. in using Handsworth Park without permission for balloon ascents."²⁹

Outside Birmingham in the town of Sutton Coldfield, but largely used by Birmingham residents, the enormous Sutton Park was commandeered in September 1914 by the army as a training site for Birmingham City regiments. While one member of the Sutton Coldfield Town Council "was afraid once the huts were erected in the park their use would be

continued after the war," another realized: "either the Council granted the liberty asked for to the War Office or they would take it."³⁰ The Gazette noted hopefully: "the park will not be closed to the public during the period the men are in training," though "some restrictions may be placed upon visitors."³¹ The soldiers themselves enjoyed the huge park, at least according to the press:

"Why, it's like a holiday," remarked one young fellow, the greater part of whose life since he left school four or five years ago has been spent on an office stool.

"Of course, we are already finding out that it's not going to be an easy time for us. We shall be drilling for seven or eight hours a day, and then there will be lectures to attend in the evening; but still, it is the open-air life that appeals especially to most of us."³²

Local residents welcomed the soldiers, one even complaining when his house was not selected for billeting. The drilling itself proved a popular attraction to the public: "The first parade was fixed for three o'clock ... The afternoon was fine, and a large number of persons gathered to witness the assembly."³³ Trench-digging also occurred in Sutton Park.

The largest military building in Birmingham, however, was the aerodrome begun in the city's Castle Bromwich Playing Fields in 1915. While the park committee was not enthusiastic about this plan, the Town Clerk pointed out: "Inasmuch as the War Office have power to take them compulsorily, if they so desire, it is impossible for your Commit-

tee to object," and the military agreed to "arrange their operations that the playing fields could be used on Saturday afternoons for football and cricket."³⁴ But the park committee's initial stipulation that sports should continue at the site quickly eroded, and it concluded gloomily (and presciently) in early 1918:

The Government have now spent more than £200,000 on this Aerodrome, and they are erecting at the south-west corner a factory ... In view of these facts, and the additional one that the site is near the centre of the greatest aeroplane manufacturing district in the Kingdom ... the probability of the Government relinquishing the Castle Bromwich Aerodrome after the war is very small.³⁵

Disused mansion houses in King's Heath and Warley Parks were used to accommodate Belgian refugees, while in Erdington and Lightwoods Parks houses were converted into a convalescent home and a hospital for wounded soldiers. War memorials also arrived in Birmingham parks early in the war. In 1915, a Gatling gun was installed in Sparkhill Park, and a war shrine was erected in King's Norton Village Green in 1917. Lord Norton, the donor of Adderley Park who had remained active in the park's management, placed it on the War Office's waiting list for war trophies in 1917.

In Bath, the military authorities took over Sydney Gardens in November 1914 "for drilling or mustering purposes," and the tennis courts in the Gardens were used for cooking. The park committee was amenable, and "would

readily grant any facilities wished. ... they had to make some sacrifices in the Gardens for the good of the country."³⁶ The army took over more of Sydney Gardens in 1917 for use as a coal store. Public reaction was not uniformly positive, however. In December 1914, the grazing tenant of Victoria Park complained about soldiers digging trenches there. Concerned to avoid "a dispute in which the Corporation might incidentally become involved," the Town Clerk mediated negotiations between the tenant and the colonel in charge of the regiment.³⁷ It was settled that the military authorities would pay rent to the tenant, while the tenant's rent to the Corporation would be reduced and the land used for trenches fenced off at the city's expense.

Military park use in Bath increased later in the war. In 1915, a Cadet Corps drawn from the city's secondary schools began drilling in Henrietta Park. The army established a motor transport camp in the Middle Common (adjoining Victoria Park) in 1916, this time working out the details in advance with both the tenant and the Corporation. When the army also applied for use of the Lower Common (adjoining Victoria Park) Playground for infantry training, the park committee agreed only on the condition that the army should not use it on Saturday, when it was most popular with children. The playground was also used as a drill ground by the School of Aeronautics from 1918 to 1919.

Budget and Staff Reductions. Soldiers and military buildings, though perhaps the most visible new element in parks, did not account for all wartime changes in park use. Once it had become clear that the war would not end within weeks, budget and staff reductions imposed new restrictions on public parks. Many park employees left their jobs either to enlist or to take higher-paying munitions work. This, along with significant budget cutbacks as funds were diverted to the war effort, forced park authorities to re-evaluate priorities in park use.

In London, many royal park employees enlisted voluntarily. Where they did not leave, complaints were sometimes heard. John Bull wrote in 1915: "WE WANT MEN. ... Greenwich Park is under the command of an Army major, who might tell us why it is that he has a band of healthy young men of military age sweeping up the autumn leaves, while old men, who cannot be soldiers, are turned away from their work in the park."³⁸ This particular article was traced to a disgruntled former worker, but it led to concern within the OW about the number of park workers who had enlisted. A conference of park superintendents determined that 103 park workers had enlisted, 24 were unfit and 99 eligible workers remained. They decided that "eligible men should, as far as possible, not be employed in doing light work, such as sweeping up leaves, in prominent places, as liable to cause

comment," but that "Although every encouragement should be shewn to men who desire to join the Forces, no compulsion must be exercised." The Secretary approved of this neutral policy: "Gardeners are often very sensitive natures to whom all war is especially repugnant."³⁹ This strategy did not end criticism. A 1916 letter to The Times complained:

This morning, in the flower walk of Kensington Gardens, six able-bodied gardeners -- only one of whom could be described as elderly -- were engaged on the important national work of planting heliotropes and fuchsias in beds already crowded with plants. [while] All over the country vegetable gardens are now lying fallow because gardeners cannot be obtained.⁴⁰

The LCC was less indulgent towards its unenlisted workers than the OW, and quickly dismissed two employees of German nationality. By October 1914, 141 of its park employees had enlisted, and recruiting notices were posted in most parks.⁴¹ In 1917, it even began an investigation into "men of military age in the parks service who are still at their work and have not been medically rejected for military service or exempted, and as to whether conscientious objection to military service has been notified in such case."⁴²

In both royal and municipal parks, enlistments left the parks short-staffed. Both the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Board of Trade urged the LCC to help train women for agricultural and gardening work, and six women were taken on in 1916.⁴³ Other citizens volunteered to

help replace workers. A reader of the Gardeners' Chronicle suggested flower gardening in parks in 1915 as "an opportunity for the patriotic volunteer disqualified by age or other disability from joining the forces and who is at the same time unfitted for the munitions bench."⁴⁴ Another Londoner suggested that the LCC solicit "men and women who can spare a few hours weekly to patrol parks, open spaces, and allotments" to prevent damage, especially by "mischievous boys."⁴⁵ The YMCA ran soldiers' canteens during the war, including a refreshment booth in Hyde Park to entertain soldiers with billiards, bowling and concerts, and "Ladies are there continuously to entertain soldiers very much as they would in their own homes."⁴⁶ Other volunteers arranged entertainments for wounded soldiers in other parks. One woman, an LCC schoolteacher, volunteered as a park-keeper in 1917, although it is not clear whether her offer was accepted.

Decreases in park staff were matched by decreases in funding. The Times commented: "the scarcity of labour will show itself ... in lawns less trimly mown, in shrubberies unweeded, in drives, and paths less smartly kept."⁴⁷ The LCC coped with reductions in its budget not only by reducing planting and maintenance, but by cutting its stock of waterfowl, though it declined a suggestion to dispose of "animals (especially deer) other than those which are gifts," despite

the "urgent necessity for reducing bulky imports."⁴⁸ In 1916 it stopped hiring bands to play in its parks, instead allowing bands to perform in return for chair hire and program fees. This measure reduced the cost of music in the parks from £5,100 the previous year to less than £100.⁴⁹ The same year a charge was introduced for those playing games in the parks. The royal parks also faced budget cuts. The OW Bailiff noted with relief in 1915: "As far as can be ascertained we are doing as much in the way of economy as the L.C.C."⁵⁰

In Birmingham, the Post anticipated in August 1914 that "The Baths and Parks staff will be weakened by withdrawals," and less than a week later, the park committee met to consider revised staffing plans.⁵¹ Fifteen employees had already been called up for service, increased to 45 by the end of 1914. The pressure on park staff increased in 1915 when the Local Government Board urged the city to "lend to the War Office every available man in their service ... a case of sacrificing the public services of Birmingham in order that the needs of the nation might be supplied."⁵²

These further reductions, with 105 men enlisted by the end of 1915, had several results. The park superintendent took on a dozen women gardeners. Recreation grounds now did not open until 11.30 a.m., and later, "in view of the urgent need of economy and reducing of expenditure owing to the

War," the hours were reduced still further, and night lighting was discontinued.⁵³ By 1916, when conscription was introduced, the pressure on park personnel was so intense that the park committee appealed (unsuccessfully) to the County Tribunal when two more park employees were drafted.

Financial restrictions also affected other aspects of Birmingham parks, as money flowed away from entertainment to the war effort. Some of the city's public swimming pools were also closed to save money. In September 1914, the proceeds of two park concerts were donated to the Prince of Wales's Relief Fund. The park committee voted to continue dancing and Sunday concerts for 1915, but to eliminate choirs. The City Police Band, the major concert-giver in the parks, had to discontinue its concerts at the end of 1915. The appearance of saving money was as important as the actuality. In 1916, the park committee voted to cancel the Whit-Monday and Tuesday concerts in the parks since the Lord Mayor thought "the bands being there would be against the spirit of the appeal which had been made by the Government ... it would have a very great moral effect."⁵⁴ When a new plot of land was presented to the Corporation for a park, the Lord Mayor emphasized: "most of the money for the purchase of this land was promised and subscribed before the war, so that the acquisition had not interfered with any relief effort."⁵⁵

In Bath, where only three park employees had enlisted by the end of 1915, one councillor commented acidly of the four or five remaining: "I hope they are not told they cannot be spared."⁵⁶ Scheduled concerts by the bands of the 4th Somerset Light Infantry and the Wessex Divisional Engineers were quickly cancelled as these regiments were mobilized. Eligible male parkgoers still engaging in normal recreation in parks sparked criticism. One Bathonian wrote the Chronicle: "There are scores of young shirkers in Bath who perambulate the parks and streets, displaying fancy socks and puffing cheap cigarettes. ... They should send them to the right about and tell them to do their duty to the country."⁵⁷ When attendants were needed for the bowling greens in Sydney Gardens and Alexandra Park, the park committee resolved that discharged soldiers should be given preference for the job; when none applied, women were hired instead.

Budget cuts caused particular concern in Bath, where one councillor asked "Whether they were going in for a general system of lessening labour in the parks and gardens and allowing them to depreciate," or "keeping the parks up to a certain standard" to attract tourists."⁵⁸ The Illustrated London News commented: "since the war has closed to British visitors many once-popular Continental resorts, the attractions to be found at home will make an irresistible

appeal," and cited among these the "numerous parks and pleasure-grounds of Bath."⁵⁹ Band concerts continued through the summer of 1915, some free to all, others with paid admission, but free to wounded soldiers and Belgian refugees. But later in 1915, the park committee reduced the park budgets. Destroyed park trees would no longer be replaced. After the LCC announced the cancellation of its concerts, a Bath columnist hastened to argue: "What London may do with impunity in this respect, Bath may not do without serious disadvantage" to its tourist economy.⁶⁰ The park committee cancelled free concerts in the public parks for the 1916 season, but continued a series of paid concerts. Thus in all three cities, the war reduced numbers of park employees and the range of park activities.

Parks and the Food Supply. The third area in which public parks contributed to the war effort emerged a little later in the war, but proved no less significant than soldiers' drills or budget cuts. By 1916, hopes of an early finish to the war had largely evaporated, and long-term plans for the provision of food were given more priority, including the idea that park land should be used to create individual allotment gardens. While park managers initially resisted the idea, the press and national government support prevailed. Some such operations were run directly by park

authorities, but most served as allotment gardens for the general public.

The idea of allotment gardens arose first in Birmingham. One reader of the Gazette wrote in August 1914 to suggest that "the Baths and Parks Committee of our city, instead of planting the flower beds, which will soon be over, with bulbs ... plant them with such vegetables as can be grown throughout the winter, such as cabbage, cauliflowers, etc.," but another quickly countered:

I do sincerely hope we shall not get into a panic over the supply of vegetables for the coming winter. So many suggestions have been made as to waste places and gardens being utilised for the growing of crops for the poor that one is almost inclined to laugh at some of them; and now you get a letter suggesting the Parks Committee should use their flower beds for the purpose.⁶¹

Despite these disagreements, Birmingham's parks found several new agricultural uses during the war.

As early as 1915, the park superintendent was instructed to prepare Perry Park for potato growing, and seventeen acres were given out in allotments. The following year the superintendent reported bumper potato crops from Perry Park and Victoria Common, and allotment holders demanded more space. In early 1917, the park committee added new allotment land in Aston, Handsworth, King's Heath and Cotteridge Parks, areas selected for their rough condition in hopes that after the war they would return to

the parks in better condition. With the help of a new power of compulsory purchase, the committee even acquired new allotment land to be cultivated under its management. As many as 12,000 allotments in all were "readily taken up by working men," and eleven parks were devoted to potato growing.⁶² Pig and poultry breeding were also introduced in four parks.

In London, the Times made a pointed plea supporting the allotment movement: "what is needed to fix public attention on it is some striking effort by a State Department, such as ... the Office of Works, or else some municipal authority, like the London County Council, to show the good that may result from it."⁶³ Questions were asked in the House of Commons about using Hyde Park and Regent's Park to plant potatoes. By 1917, even the royal park employees petitioned for allotments in the parks, and the OW finally agreed. Allotments were granted in both 1917 and 1918, though "It was in every case clearly indicated that the concession was of a temporary nature owing to war conditions."⁶⁴ While most allotments came from suburban parks, and central Hyde Park had to be reserved for use as an emergency airstrip, Kensington Gardens and Regent's Park displayed model allotment gardens designed to instruct city dwellers how to grow vegetables. Park-keepers on duty answered questions and offered information booklets. Sample

crops included potatoes, cabbage, turnips, beans, onions, parsnips, carrots, peas, marrows, lettuce and rhubarb.⁶⁵

These concessions soon proved inadequate, however. In 1918, the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries informed the OW: "The demand for allotments by the residents in London is becoming increasingly great," and suggested that more royal park land be devoted to cultivation. The Bailiff refused: "in the [central] London Parks no more space could be found," though "at [suburban] Hampton Court, Bushy Park, and Richmond Parks, more land might be utilized for allotments, if required." But the suburban parks where space was available were inconvenient, and the Secretary pointed out: "the Local Council has never been able to get sufficient allotment holders to fill the ground allotted in Bushy on a permanent basis in spite of wide advertisements."⁶⁶ Furthermore, experiments in growing oats at Richmond and Bushy Parks had produced net losses despite contributions of free seed. Though "the work was not mainly intended as a commercial transaction, but to stimulate activity in food production in the country," it did not provide a very successful model in that respect.⁶⁷

Though it had quickly dismissed proposals to grow vegetables in its parks in 1915, the same pressure to create allotments now fell upon the LCC. Model gardens were established in six municipal parks. By 1918, the LCC parks

produced an impressive 3-1/2 tons of tomatoes and 96-1/2 tons of hay.⁶⁸ Yet this was not enough. The Local Government Board urged that despite "the undesirability of any curtailment of the open spaces available for recreation in London," it felt that "in existing conditions the production of the maximum amount of food is of paramount importance."⁶⁹ The LCC refused at first, but finally agreed to provide more allotments in several south London parks, since "Although this would entail sacrifice of facilities for healthy recreation in a crowded district, the committee deferred to the views of the Board on account of the urgency of the food question."⁷⁰ In return, the cricket grounds at Battersea and Finsbury Parks and some land in those parks was preserved for general recreation. This concession brought the total number of LCC allotments in municipal parks to some 13,000.

These allotment gardens vastly changed the appearances of public parks. Food production was not limited to tidy rows of vegetables. A historian of the LCC recalled: "The grass of playing-grounds which were not in use was left unmown for haymaking. Even the fish in the ornamental ponds were caught --- and sold for food."⁷¹ Such changes were not universally appreciated by the general public. One Londoner urged the LCC to post signs in its parks "to reassure the public ... that the land used for allotments had only

been withdrawn from the public as a war measure, and would be restored on the conclusion of the war."⁷²

Livestock appeared in the parks as well. The usual flocks of sheep used to graze down the grass increased, and one child later remembered that "during those war years Hyde Park north of the Serpentine was occupied by enormous flocks of sheep, which became so inured to the presence of human beings that the two species intermingled, I was going to say indistinguishably."⁷³ In 1918, a meeting of the Women's Land Army in Hyde Park included a farmyard exhibition featuring lambs, pigs, hens and ducks, as well as a hay-making demonstration. The war, through the institution of allotment gardens and livestock, temporarily restored some of the original rural character to London parks.

Bath did not set up a formal allotment program in its public parks, since enough land was available elsewhere. Councillors joked blithely about growing vegetables in Victoria Park, though a few informal agreements were made for cultivation of park land. In 1916 part of the Victoria Park farm was sublet to a Bath woman for a poultry run, while in 1917 a Bath man rented part of the High Common to grow potatoes. A 1917 suggestion from the Board of Agriculture for cultivation of parks was refused, however, since "in the opinion of this Committee it is not desirable to proceed with the breaking up for cultivation of public parks

until all other available land in the City has been cultivated."⁷⁴ The city agreed only to allow the park superintendent and gardeners to provide expert assistance to the War Food Society in their own land plots. Allotment gardens, as well as soldiers' training and financial limitation, provoked increasing protests from the public in all three cities as the war wore on.

Parks as Refuge

World War I thus reduced public use and enjoyment of the public parks in several ways: partial military takeovers of the parks, reduced budgets and the introduction of allotments. At the same time, a public increasingly depressed by grim war news and routines sought escape in the parks' natural environment, and often resisted the military presence there. Two particular issues, flower gardening and children's sports, inspired intense debate. Flowers were alternately portrayed as a waste of public money, and as a necessary component of public morale. Facilities for physical exercise seemed particularly important when so many men were needed to fight, and when the general population showed such poor health that minimum physical standards for enlistment had to be lowered again and again during the war.

The initial outburst of enthusiasm to make public parks exemplars of the war effort began to fade, while

civilian demands to retain prewar leisure activities in parks co-opted patriotic language in an effort to gain more support. The very function of parks as a refuge from the war, these citizens argued, was itself a contribution to the war, since hard-working Britons could restore their physical energy and morale in the parks. These discussions echoed the earlier efforts of private park institutions, such as botanical and zoological gardens, to justify their use of parks in national and imperial terms.

Flower Gardening. Both practical considerations and patriotic fervor helped to reduce the planting of flowers in public parks beginning in 1915, though some citizens defended the patriotic function of flower gardens. In London, the Bailiff proposed in 1915 that "It would be an object lesson to practically the whole country, that economy was being exercised -- and an actual saving of £700," if no bulbs were planted that year in the royal parks. The First Commissioner agreed heartily: "I think all bulbs should be omitted and nothing should be used or planted throughout the year which we have not actually in hand or which w'd otherwise be wanted."⁷⁵ The general public was thinking along the same lines. A letter to The Times suggested discontinuing park flowers as "a salutary measure of national economy," and argued: "It would set free a number of men for employment on war work or for enlistment, and it

would serve as a much needed object-lesson.⁷⁶ King George soon agreed to reduced planting in the royal palace gardens.

Yet his mother, Queen Alexandra, refused to have her gardens at Marlborough House altered despite the best efforts of the OW First Commissioner, who wrote her: "it is the duty, as it will be the pleasure, of all in high positions to set an example of thrift to all their neighbours."⁷⁷ The Queen insisted that her gardens would be too depressing without flowers. There was some public support for her position. Some citizens argued that parks could usefully serve the war effort, and the nation, by keeping up public morale through just such expenditures as flower gardens.

The issue was much discussed in the press. Truth argued pointedly: "in Germany the public flower gardens and all similar public services have been kept up most scrupulously ... the sight of flowers has a valuable moral effect."⁷⁸ A reader of the Gardener's Chronicle argued: "never more than at the present moment do we require to keep our parks and gardens gay with flowers as an antidote to the carnage in which our minds are steeped."⁷⁹ Another supporter wrote in the Field:

Public parks and gardens ... are doubly useful surely when our people need a change now and then ... If there were no flowers or other objects of interest in the parks these people would not go to them, probably they would go to places less wholesome.⁸⁰

Government officials eventually reached a compromise on this issue, in which planting in the royal parks was reduced by half, with only existing plant stock used. The following year, the annual flower show at Hampton Court Park was cancelled, to the dismay of local residents. The LCC likewise reduced planting in London's municipal parks.

Flowers took a different turn in Birmingham parks. In 1915, Cannon Hill Park featured "a wonderfully designed bed of flowers, in which is represented the Union Jack, surrounded by the flags of the Allies."⁸¹ In Bath flowers, as with music, formed part of the tourist economy. The Chronicle protested in 1915: "Floral embellishment in resorts like Bath ... demands expenditure which is a necessity."⁸² One councillor agreed, arguing that cutting out park bulbs "would be a penny wise and a pound foolish," but he was overruled.⁸³ No bulbs were purchased in Bath in 1915, and the moratorium continued until 1919.⁸⁴

Children's Sports. Sports grounds in public parks, as discussed in Chapter 3, had become extremely popular in the years before the war. Both schoolchildren and athletic clubs used these facilities, which included football, cricket, hockey, tennis, croquet and bowling greens, and swimming and skating in parks with lakes. The outbreak of war changed sports in the parks in two ways. Many grounds were converted to direct military uses, and those remaining

were more frequently allocated to soldiers' teams rather than to children or to clubs. Citizens who did not grudge soldiers space to drill felt differently when innocent schoolchildren, already much affected by the war, lost out to regimental football matches.

Schoolchildren's sports privileges in London's public parks had been granted after long campaigns by the LCC and sympathetic M.P.s. After children's grounds in Kensington Gardens were allocated to trench digging in 1914, the LCC requested new ones in Hyde Park instead. The OW Bailiff hesitated:

In view of the Military purposes to which Hyde Park is being put -- it would perhaps be well to refuse permission for organized games in this Park. ... unless the W.O. and Admiralty state that they do not want the ground entirely for their own use.⁸⁵

The War Office and Admiralty did not give up any ground. But in 1915 the LCC's pleas recurred, and though the Bailiff cautioned: "once ... any ground in the Gardens is surrendered for a particular purpose there is little prospect of ever getting it back," the First Commissioner overruled him and allowed children's sports in Hyde Park for the first time.⁸⁶ At the same time, the LCC's own parks also suffered. The Battersea Juvenile Welfare Council complained that "considerable injury had been done to the boy population in Battersea by the withdrawal of the public swimming baths for military purposes."⁸⁷

Children's sports declined not only from scarce grounds and military sports, but also from reduced park staffs and budgets. The LCC stopped marking out football and hockey pitches in its parks, reduced the hours of bathing lakes and eliminated illuminations for evening skating "for the period of the war."⁸⁸ In addition, charges were instituted in 1916 for tennis courts, bowling greens and croquet lawns in the parks.

In Birmingham, the most innovative city where children's sports were concerned, the war posed problems of both space and money. While the park committee resolved in 1915 to continue the popular organized games program it had pioneered in its parks, by 1916 budget pressure eliminated the program. This brought protests from the Council's Central Care Committee:

there is evidence of a growing lack of discipline shown by the children of the City, and a falling off in their behaviour in the streets. ... Prominent amongst the means provided in the past few years for promoting good behaviour not less than healthy physical development have been the organised games in Parks and Open Spaces of the City. ... at the present time even more than at other times the City would⁸⁹ be well re-paid for the expenditure involved.

The Bishop of Birmingham weighed in as well: "Everyone is abnormal at the present time ... Many fathers of families are away from home and ... a good many of the mothers have not been exercising very much influence over their children lately."⁹⁰ While the committee sympathized with these

pleas, there was simply no money in the budget to pay the organizers of the games. Instead, a public appeal was made, with one of the councillors guaranteeing any money not raised by subscription, and the park games thus continued through the war. The organizer of this program expressed the common belief that children's recreation deserved priority in wartime:

A War like the present emphasises the urgency for our children to grow up healthy and vigorous ... it is a solemn duty, of the greatest National importance, for these children, many now orphans, to be brought up in the best condition, physical and mental; and the playing of games, in the right spirit and the right way, is an essential part of the bringing up.⁹¹

Bath had no special sports programs for children like those in London and Birmingham, but the war did alter sports facilities there. In September 1914, after "a very full and friendly discussion," a public meeting led by the Mayor of Bath resolved to postpone football and hockey, "except among those under the age of 17," until Christmas of that year.⁹² The bowling greens and tennis courts remained open through the war, however, and in 1917 the fees for soldiers were reduced from 2d. to 1d. an hour, "in consideration of their rendering assistance in rolling and cutting the green."⁹³ Bath's park system was less susceptible than those in London and Birmingham to wartime alterations, partly because it had fewer programs to cut, and partly because of the ever-present tourist factor.

With limited sports grounds, parks witnessed new kinds of children's recreation. One London child later remembered his

beloved playground, Bishop's Park ... [with] the sound, audible from my bedroom, of bugles calling Reveille, Cookhouse, Last Post, etc. to the troops hurriedly encamped there ... [and] a pierrot concert party in the bandstand singing Ivor Novello's 'Keep the Home Fires Burning'.⁹⁴

Another Londoner recorded changes in children's games in Kensington Gardens: "Instead of ball-games, or Red Indians, or pirates, it was 'Germans -- and -- English.'" The children's nurses no longer read books, but "every nurse had wool of the same colour -- a dirty sort of brown; and every nurse seemed to be making the same kind of thing." The writer, who was by no means critical of these changes, concluded: "The thing to do now is to grow up, and do it for England in earnest."⁹⁵ Recreation could only be a partial escape from the war, even for children and even in parks.

Recreation and Patriotism. Adults, even more than children, consciously sought refuge from the war in parks, yet felt the need to justify such park activities in patriotic and national terms. Even soldiers used the parks for recreation as well as for training. A 1917 guide for soldiers on leave in London recommended visits to Hyde Park, Richmond Park, Bushy Park, Hampstead Heath and particularly to Kew Gardens:

the complete escape that the Gardens offer from the roar and rush of the London streets, make them well worth a visit. ... Here has come many a jaded Londoner, many a tired worker, to find rest and relaxation amid the beauties of the Gardens.⁹⁶

One Londoner wrote a grateful essay on the value of Kensington Gardens in 1918:

as the war has dragged on from year to year this sense of escape has become more and more precious, the assurance of some pleasant permanence in a changing world. ... Here is a fragment of the beauty and peace and sanity which the accursed Germans are destroying wherever they can reach.⁹⁷

Adult sports in parks required more elaborate defenses than those for children. In Birmingham, a local paper noted in 1915: "in the parks [tennis] still goes strong, and a great many men of military age are still to be found there obtaining relaxation from ... let us charitably assume ... Government work."⁹⁸ Bath's mayor had to defend bowling greens in his parks: "men and women who were staying at home and doing their duty were entitled to some recreation in the fresh air."⁹⁹ A request to stage plays in Bath's Sydney Gardens in 1915 faced stiff questions from councillors who demanded to know "if these plays were recruiting plays" and "if there would be any young men of recruiting age taking part;" the application was granted only after another councillor insisted that the committee "had also to keep the life of the City going, and to make provision for those who were compelled to stay at home."¹⁰⁰

Other park activities also faced new criticism in wartime from ultra-patriots, whose suggestions to park authorities were taken more seriously than usual. One citizen protested against the music of German composers being played at concerts in LCC parks, which was apparently eliminated. The British Workers' League and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (Poplar branch) protested against public parks being used for "seditious and treasonable [pacifist] meetings at a time of grave national peril" during a meeting held in Finsbury Park in 1917.¹⁰¹

Relatively few public meetings actually occurred during the war, though those relating to controversial issues like pacifism or internment of aliens sparked opposition. The Defence of the Realm Act in force during the war did give the Home Office power to prohibit meetings, but this power was rarely used and local authorities were permitted to cancel meetings only in cases of grave disorder. The Home Office also took steps to ensure that this decision did not rest with the military: "There is the strongest objection to putting the power of stopping processions in England in the hands of the competent military authority in England. The C.M.A. would prohibit meetings right and left."¹⁰² The LCC decided to evaluate public meetings in parks for their potential "to be provo-

cative of public feeling," and a planned labor demonstration in Finsbury Park was banned with Home Office approval in May 1918.¹⁰³ But when this action led to protests, a substitute meeting was held in the park a month later.

The tension between parks' dual wartime roles also affected discussions of sexual morality. While military authorities opened brothels for men serving at the front, relaxed morals at home met with renewed opposition. Sexual morality, as discussed in Chapter 3, had always inspired some level of conflict, but public attention to the issue seemed to increase during the war. Groups such as the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality petitioned park authorities to institute increased supervision and women patrols.

Soldiers camping in or using the parks were now accused of fomenting indecency. One woman complained in 1915 about Hyde Park:

the gross indecency of a great number of very young girls & soldiers & civilian young men in the Park now makes it really impossible for decent young women to walk there after say 6 p.m. I have often to cross the park to see after a buffet for soldiers but it is so disgusting to see these people that now I am compelled to take a taxi.¹⁰⁴

Though soldiers commanded sympathy in their official function, they also inspired resentment when relaxing in parks, and reminded frustrated civilians of a war they hoped to forget for a few hours.

By 1918, the Morality Council sent the Home Office detailed observations collected by teams of patrols sent to parks during that summer, noting offenders including "soldiers, sailors, and wounded men -- one of the latter being minus his right foot."¹⁰⁵ These reports show an extreme zeal in catching offenders, for most of the observations could only have been made while hiding in bushes for extended periods of time. Ironically, the increasing military presence in the parks also created new obstacles. At Ladywell Recreation Ground, "The parts which were very bad then are now all turned into allotments, and the place where the girls used to enter the soldiers' quarters, all the bricks and stones which they used to walk across on have all been taken away, and the Army Authorities have a sentry on duty also."¹⁰⁶

The shortage of police and park-keepers during the war meant that less, not more, supervision could be exercised. The Metropolitan Police could suggest only better lighting at night as a remedy, one clearly impossible in wartime. One Home Office official commented in 1916 when complaints were received about Hampstead Heath: "the state of affairs is scandalous. ... No doubt the difficulties ... are now increased by the want of men -- both Police and rangers;" while another concluded: "The problem of how to deal with what is admittedly a grave evil and one which is more preva-

lent during war time than in normal times has not yet been solved."¹⁰⁷

Some official action was taken, as discussed in Chapter 3. New notices were posted in London's royal and municipal parks in 1917 prohibiting indecent behavior. Women patrols were used experimentally in 1917 and 1918 in both royal and municipal parks to help augment the shrunken police force. The police admitted early in 1919: "There has undoubtedly been some cause for complaint during war-time, but the return to peace conditions will, it is thought, mean an improvement as the paths will then be more frequently patrolled than has been possible latterly owing to shortage of personnel."¹⁰⁸ No wartime solution could be found.

Indecency was also a wartime concern in Birmingham. The park committee received a petition from the Women's Patrol Committee in 1915 asking to supervise children in the parks, but declined to take action, since "offences which were prevalent in the Parks previous to the employment of policemen had since been stamped out," and there are no references in the minutes to letters of complaint about adults.¹⁰⁹ However, by 1918 the committee recommended: "better supervision should be made with regard to the patrolling of the Parks, particularly with respect to the conduct of young men and women."¹¹⁰ Discharged soldiers or women were sought for this work. Thus, whether flowers,

children or morals seemed threatened, citizens proved as eager to defend wartime recreation in parks as they had to sacrifice parks to the war effort.

The Aftermath of War

An armistice in November 1918 ended hostilities in Europe, and the peace treaty was signed at Versailles the following summer. Britain's official celebrations in July 1919, discussed in Chapter 5, helped to reconcile the conflicting wartime images of parks. Public space could now illustrate national unity and public identity through inclusive festivity, rather than through limits on park activities. Yet the war experience colored every aspect of the celebrations. Soldiers played a central role, marching in the procession while their wounded comrades enjoyed special parade seating. Women war workers gained a new right to march in the procession, where they were "especially popular."¹¹¹

There were other changes as well. In addition to the usual children's entertainments, concerts and fireworks in the parks, Hyde Park contained a new war shrine. Donated by private subscription in August 1918, and originally intended to be temporary, this small wooden structure featured flags and fresh flowers. But as the winter passed, it began to fall apart and became an eyesore. Though one citizen argued:

"this spot in Hyde Park is now a sacred space," the OW Bailiff condemned its "pitiable appearance," and considered it had more than "served its purpose."¹¹² The shrine was finally removed several months later.

Peace Day provided a brief interlude between the hardships of war and imminent labor and suffrage unrest. The Times observed: "The gathering was almost as varied as it was numerous. It realized the democratic ideal of all classes rubbing shoulders with one another, possessed by a single aim ... They were performing a patriotic duty in joining the public tribute to brave men."¹¹³ Ceremonies in Birmingham and Bath were equally enthusiastic, though everywhere festivity was quickly superseded by renewed anxiety about the future. At the same time that these ceremonies were being planned and new war memorials for the parks debated, however, park authorities were already moving to oust the military from the special privileges they had enjoyed in the parks during the war. The struggle to restore prewar conditions in public parks was to be a prolonged one, with no quick military departures in any of the three cities.

In London, only a few days after the Armistice, the Bailiff prepared to reclaim park land: "the conditions made were that all Trenches should be filled in by the Troops. This however, has not been done."¹¹⁴ "Temporary" military

buildings had altered the London parks even more significantly, and the OW went on the offensive: "We must write to all asking them when they can demobilise from the Public Parks & say that the F.[irst] C.[ommissioner] attaches importance to surrendering sites at as early a date as possible."¹¹⁵ Most of the military departments concerned replied evasively, and in the case of Richmond Park even continued to construct new buildings, which ceased only after protests from Buckingham Palace. The Air Ministry tried to shift the burden: "the Gotha machine was placed in the Park following a request made by the Prime Minister personally ... perhaps you would care to consider taking up the question of removal through the Private Secretaries at Downing Street."¹¹⁶

The campaign was not fought by the OW alone, however, and was strengthened by petitions from the general public. One Londoner complained in January 1919:

Since the early days of the war the favourite walk along the sunny and sheltered side of the Long Water [in Kensington Gardens] has been closed to the public. ... It seems to some of us that the time has now come when ... the strip of land ... might be again restored to the public. This concession would be a real benefit to those people of both sexes and all ages ... together with many wounded and infirm soldiers in this district.¹¹⁷

A suggestion for new sports facilities in Regent's Park was blocked by "the large number of temporary buildings erected in the Park" and "the use of the Park as a training ground

for cavalry and artillery, as well as infantry, which has cut up the surface." A proposal involving a field adjacent to Kensington Gardens, faced similar objections by Princess Louise, its owner: "she lends this field on all sorts of occasions for troops to bivouac and play games ... the Dominion Troops used it on many occasions during the war."¹¹⁸ Efforts to reclaim the royal parks for civilians seemed to be hopelessly stalled. But in June 1919, the Sunday church parade returned to Hyde Park, and though "those who paraded or watched the parade made rather a sombre impression. Khaki is still wonderfully prevalent," there was also an "air of pre-war animation over the whole scene."¹¹⁹

Questions were asked in the House of Commons in April, May and June 1919 about re-opening still-occupied parts of Kensington Gardens to the public. The OW First Commissioner replied that

he had been trying to get the military authorities to remove the camouflage school from Kensington-gardens ... and to bring to an end military operations in Richmond Park. But the military authorities were still so pressed for accommodation that additional huts had to be erected in Regent's Park ... it was useless to expect any substantial progress with the buildings this year.¹²⁰

Questioned again in June, he said: "I have done my utmost ... and have now received an assurance from the military authorities that the demolition will be commenced in about

10 days' time," but his unplaced questioner demanded: "Cannot the right hon. gentleman use some disciplinary action against the obstinacy, stupidity, slackness, or carelessness shown in this matter?"¹²¹ By October 1919, only one building had been entirely removed.

The public also proved eager to resume their prewar activities in London's municipal parks. 170 Londoners signed a petition to the LCC in February 1919 to restore LCC bands to the parks and German music to the bands' repertoires. The return of bands, flowers and games was announced in April along with the return of most of the absent park staff. The LCC provided sandboxes in the parks for children whose families could not afford to go to the seaside for the vacations which were now reinstated, having been postponed during the war.¹²² The war was also remembered in many memorials; by October 1918, six German guns were already on exhibition in LCC parks, with ten more to come.

The LCC found the military similarly tenacious in the municipal parks. The Admiralty declined to evacuate land in Wormwood Scrubs and asked for a three year extension to build an experimental gas laboratory. An aviation factory at Ham caused protests when rumors circulated that it would become permanent, since it blocked a celebrated view from Richmond Hill. Another problem occurred at the Embankment

Gardens, which "will, unfortunately, remain in their present state for some time, though every effort will be made to make the flower beds that have not been built upon as picturesque as possible."¹²³ Battersea Park and Clapham Common were still occupied. The War Office conceded in November 1919 that orders had been issued to evacuate anti-aircraft stations, but that the military hospitals and other facilities were likely to remain occupied for some time.

Army sports privileges also proved hard to revoke after the war ended. The unprecedented conditions during the war seemed to have convinced the military that park use was open to negotiation, and that it held the upper hand. Even before the final peace treaty had been signed, the army was pressing for permanent, exclusive sports facilities in Regent's Park. Brigadier-General Kentish, President of the War Office Recreation Ground Committee, visited the OW several times and finally sent a lengthy letter detailing his case, using both patriotic and moral arguments:

in asking that these small portions of the Royal Parks be set aside entirely for the troops, we are making a fair and natural request ...

It's on the playing fields where our national games are played and where we've taught and I hope where we will continue to teach them how to play the game for their side and how to be sportsmen in the truest sense that the moral effect of football and cricket makes its presence felt.¹²⁴

Kentish's counterarguments to anticipated OW objections boiled down to an assertion that the army deserved more than the general public in park use:

Those, who come forward voluntarily to serve the State ... are, it is suggested, entitled to special recognition ... Let those who complain be told to take up service.

... everybody and every community is or ought to be as a result of the Great War, through which the Nation has recently passed, busily engaged in reconstructing itself ... to see whether the conditions in the pre-war days cannot be modified with real and lasting benefit to the community.¹²⁵

In response, the OW Secretary noted: "The problem is a very difficult one ... we are getting pressed on all sides by the L.C.C. and District Elementary Schools for similar facilities for the children. My sympathies lean even more towards the children than towards the military."¹²⁶ The Bailiff also favored the "many hundred thousand children who now use the parks":

To enclose, and permanently withdraw from the Public, the use of these areas would in my opinion be impossible, would be open to strong criticism both from local Members of Parliament, the L.C.C. Education authorities, also the various Associations interested in the welfare of the young.¹²⁷

After some negotiations, the OW agreed to make grounds available to soldiers in Hyde Park, Regent's Park and Richmond Park. Having obtained its exclusive ground in Richmond Park, the army then failed ever to make use of it. In Hyde Park, however, so much use was made that part of the

park had to be closed off to the public for a time, and questions arose in the House of Commons in December 1920. The First Commissioner conceded that "the whole question will be reconsidered," and correspondence about the army's park sports privileges continued well into the 1920s.¹²⁸

Allotment holders proved nearly as determined as the army to hold onto park ground they had used during the war. When the OW began to reclaim its allotments in February 1919, it received numerous protests, and the First Commissioner emphasized to a deputation of allotment holders that

He had been very reluctant to grant any land at all and he must make it quite clear that he could not let them have any land permanently. ... they seemed to overlook the fact that the Royal Parks do not belong to the local people ... [they] are the property of the whole nation and must be preserved for the benefit of all alike.¹²⁹

The LCC defended its efforts to remove allotments in the same way, stressing

the problem of providing facilities for recreation for large numbers of men returning to city occupations fresh from the open-air conditions of Army life ... the games grounds at parks and open spaces now broken up for allotments cannot be available for recreation for a considerable time after the cessation of cultivation. It is necessary that cultivation should be discontinued as soon as practicable.¹³⁰

Since food shortages still continued, however, the OW extended its allotments in several stages until February 1921, while the LCC extended allotments on sports grounds through the end of 1919 and others through the end of 1920.

After this, despite continued petitions, the OW First Commissioner held firm:

It has been the Board's policy to put the Royal Parks to the best possible use from the national view-point, and ... a better national purpose is served by providing every facility for games than by devoting ground in the Parks to the growing of vegetables.¹³¹

By the end of 1921, the parks began to regain some of their prewar appearance.

Analysis of postwar events in Birmingham is hampered by the fact that the park committee minutes from 1918 to 1923 have vanished, so that municipal decisions must be traced through other sources. The Royal Air Force did retain the Castle Bromwich Playing Fields, as was anticipated. The Post concluded that the positions of sports in Birmingham was "much worse than a few years ago, as the acquisition by the R.A.F. of the Castle Bromwich Playing Fields has inflicted a heavy loss upon the numerous organisations who were formerly privileged to use the grounds."¹³² Thus a primary postwar concern of the park committee was to acquire new sports grounds. The movement for physical culture in Birmingham attracted private organizations as well as the City Council. In December 1919, a Juvenile Organisations Committee petitioned the park committee:

The existing pitches in the parks had necessary been neglected during the war, but the time had now come when they should be levelled and turfed

so that they would be less dangerous and more suitable for playing cricket and football.¹³³

The park committee offered sympathy, but cited the lack of funds and workers as obstacles.

While the allotments in the parks were returned to parkland, the park committee agreed to a suggestion of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries that they train discharged soldiers in agricultural and horticultural work. The War Office War Trophies Committee also presented Birmingham with a tank and three German field guns, which were installed in several parks and remained until 1929.

In Bath, postwar concern focused more on memorials of the war than on getting the military out of the parks. Sydney Gardens received three different memorials. In May 1919, Bath installed a tank there. Two months later, two doves representing peace were presented to Sydney Gardens. Finally, a captured German gun was installed there at the end of the year. Bath agreed in 1921 to allow the Lower Common to be used for allotments, a step the committee had resisted during the war, but negotiations with the tenant broke down, and the program was abandoned. Though World War I began so suddenly, and rapidly transformed public parks, it ended much more gradually. The process of returning public parks to peacetime uses stretched out over years and even decades.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experience of World War I in Britain's public parks forced a re-examination of the meaning and parameters of public space and of the public itself. The war created new tension between the parks' two roles as symbols of nation (and therefore national sacrifice), and as designated spaces for recreation and restoration for the public. As soldiers filled the parks, building on their gradually increased privileges in the prewar period, the national interest took priority over other park uses. Children's sports and flower gardens gave way to military camps, vegetables and livestock. Prewar clashes and prewar alliances gave way to new alignments in this period of crisis. Public parks in British cities formed microcosms of the war experience on the home front, where soldiers, financial hardships and food shortages were constantly visible and leisure sharply restricted. The increased military presence in the parks remained for years, and in some cases until World War II.

Yet the resulting conflicts, between those supporting and opposing wartime park changes, paradoxically helped to make a more unified postwar public possible by reopening discussions about park use and emphasizing the importance of public space. The end of the war did not result in a complete return to prewar conditions. Women, whose war work,

including work in parks, had brought them into the public eye, obtained more attention from park authorities after the war and gained new sports privileges. Children, who had always formed a central group of park users, were given more systematic attention with special playgrounds and organized games and classes.

Wartime alterations in park use led to an increased focus on existing priorities in the use of public space. As Kern argues, the war imposed a sort of forcible unity based on war work, rationing and the unreal terrors of the first modern war. In the aftermath of the war, unemployment, protests by labor and suffrage groups and the perception of a "lost generation" prevented a new sense of security from developing among the public. Yet the postwar public was well aware of its influence in questions of public space. Britain went into the twentieth century with a public memory of citizens working together to achieve victory, a cultural paradigm symbolized by war monuments and strengthened in World War II. And like the rest of Britain, the postwar public park presented an arena for the difficult renegotiation of public life.

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CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Public parks created a new community of parkgoers whose changing identity as the "public" helped stimulate the development of a more dynamic public sphere. As parks evolved from public-health remedies in the middle of the nineteenth century to become an integral part of city life by the early twentieth century, park use stimulated a change in public culture on both civic and national levels. Parks offered citizens a novel opportunity to symbolize and reshape social and cultural relationships in the city. As parkgoers transformed ideas about the public and public space through their sometimes controversial uses of and discourses about parks, they themselves constructed new links with each other. The narrower, class-defined public of the mid-nineteenth century expanded into a broader, more democratic community by 1920. Divisive class, gender, religious and political attributes were counterbalanced by a growing emphasis on national and imperial citizenship as factors in identity. Public parks became both tangible representations and ideological symbols of a more democratic public culture.

The new urban culture had its roots in the rapid urbanization of the early nineteenth century, with its profound effects on urban living conditions. Increased

concern for public health most of all, but also moral reform, pastoral ideals and economic incentives inspired Britons to demand new public parks for their cities. Private park societies recruited supporters from all levels of society, while municipal bodies acknowledged new obligations to improve city life and incorporated parks into city government. Private and public efforts together overcame various obstacles to ensure that new public parks opened in cities across Britain. By the end of the nineteenth century, public parks not only made unquestioned contributions to health and fitness, but formed an integral component of more positive attitudes about cities.

As new public parks opened to an increasing variety of parkgoers and leisure activities, various debates about the appropriate use of public parks occurred between park users and with park authorities. The designation of public space gave Britons a sense of ownership and responsibility for their parks, but also raised the difficult issue of whether public parks should cater only to model citizens, or to all. Definitions of the public first followed class lines, then drew a new boundary between the respectable and the verminous. At the same time, reformers attempting to use park rules to reshape public behavior in parks clashed with each other, with parkgoers and with park authorities over "rational" and religious activities, sports and sexual

morality. The question of whether political activity should take place in public parks inspired arguments and even physical confrontations. The shifting balance of power between individuals, private groups and park authorities finally resulted in a functional partnership in which these conflicts could be resolved. Within the range defined by park bye-laws, the public and public park behavior widened to accommodate a broader range of parkgoers and park activities.

Public parks also acquired a greater role in daily social interactions. Written public discourse, including the press, etiquette and travel guides and novels, underlined parks' increasing importance in city life. Parks continued to provide retreats for lovers, families and individuals seeking the restorative powers of nature, or merely privacy in a crowded city. But visits to parks increasingly reinforced (or alternately, threatened) class and gender status by submitting parkgoers to the public gaze, with each park visitor passing judgment on others. As class lines began to blur under the pressure of social mobility and mass consumption at the end of the nineteenth century, becoming less decisive in leisure than in other spheres of life, new codes of behavior and dress suitable for park activities developed. These rituals of recognition helped groups of parkgoers define semi-private zones within

the larger context of public life as an alternative to complete social segregation. Fashionable Society and workers, men and women created and then modified conventions for park use. Public parks brought widely disparate elements of urban society into closer proximity and interaction than in other aspects of life, but still allowed a degree of spatial separation. At the same time, travel guides highlighting parks as symbols of a city's culture attracted tourists who, as spectators of and participants in park activities, intensified public parks' role as catalysts of a more active public culture.

By the late nineteenth century, several new developments contributed to a more communal public culture in British parks. Large national ceremonies, including the revitalized royal jubilees and coronations (of which four occurred between 1887 and 1911) and the peace celebrations after World War I, were originated by government officials but largely shaped by the press and the public. These rituals adopted newly democratic traditions which included activities in public parks for children and adults of all backgrounds. Members of the public became participants as well as spectators in symbolic representations of their communities, and new ceremonies created a fund of common experience and shared memory. Both national events and smaller local rituals in parks transformed ideas about

public space, and produced new feelings of common identity in parkgoers expressed through the rhetoric of citizenship and national and imperial pride.

Awareness of national and imperial identity also increased in other aspects of public park use. Park managers, the press and private citizens all made comparisons of British and foreign parks. While some critical evaluations were intended to improve British parks, Britons overwhelmingly portrayed their parks as superior to all others. Such statements bolstered national confidence and made parks symbols of the nation, linking the condition of public parks to the state of the nation as a whole. More tangible representations of nation and empire were also constructed inside parks, including statues, flags and Shakespeare gardens. Most notably, botanical and zoological gardens gave parkgoers constant visual reminders of the growing British Empire and its value to them as citizens. Successful institutions established themselves in popular culture as well as in public parks, adding a greater national and imperial tone to the broadening public culture centered on parks.

The outbreak of World War I imposed unexpected changes on public parks, further increasing links between the national interest and public space and forcing citizens to reexamine their park habits. Public parks made significant

contributions to the war effort, not only as symbols of the nation but in practical terms as well. Soldiers and military installations, reduced budgets and numbers of park-keepers, and the devotion of park land to vegetable gardens and livestock, all made the war an insistent visual presence in the parks. But parks played a second role in wartime as pastoral refuges from the war, meeting controversial demands for flower gardens, children's sports and civilian recreation. In the aftermath of the war, as peace celebrations in the parks symbolized national unity, citizens struggled to reclaim old uses of public parks. Groups such as workers and women, who had gained new power during the war, lobbied for new park privileges, while soldiers used the role played by parks in saving the nation to advance their own claims. As with other aspects of life, prewar certainties disappeared in the postwar renegotiation of public life.

Public parks, then, significantly influenced the evolution of public culture in Britain during the period from 1870 to 1920. Their initial creation beginning in the 1840s first made the "public" a subject of vigorous debate. By 1870, parks became essential city amenities, conceptualized as the lungs of the urban body, and catering to the needs of more and more urban residents. By the early twentieth century, parks served as national symbols in ceremonies, zoos and wartime efforts. Parks and their public

developed a reciprocal relationship. The establishment of designated public space made the idea of the public a tangible reality, while broad-based public support proved essential to the creation, expansion and continued maintenance of parks in the city. Efforts to transform the meanings and uses of public parks rebounded to alter the social and cultural relationships of parkgoers and the balance of political power in the city.

As icons of civic, national and imperial culture, public parks transcended their original conception as sanitary remedies for the diseased urban poor. Class, gender, religion, and politics continued to produce social and cultural fragmentation in Britain during the period from 1870 to 1920, and led to vigorous debate about the proper role of parks. The very novelty and malleability of this new form of public space seemed to offer a unique opportunity to influence the direction of urban cultural development. But new expressions of civic and national citizenship in the use of public parks added a crucial ingredient to the cauldron of public culture. Shared ownership of such important national symbols and participation in their use meant that Britons of widely different backgrounds felt a common identity strong enough to produce a cultural consensus around public park activities and values.

Together, parkgoers comprised an active, effective public sphere of the type located by theorists like Habermas and Sennett in eighteenth-century Europe, one I argue revived in the late nineteenth century through the use of public parks. A more democratic interpretation of the "public" led to a wider distribution of power among parkgoers in the city. This public held more positive attitudes about city life and about Britain as a nation and empire, largely because a broader public culture had given it a new conception of its rights and duties. By the early twentieth century, public parks, both as physical spaces and as abstract symbols, anchored the social, cultural and political life of British cities and British citizens.

APPENDIX: ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations appear in the text and notes:

Bath CC	Bath City Council
___ PCC	___ Parks and Cemeteries Committee
___ PGC	___ Pleasure Grounds Committee
Birm CC	Birmingham City Council
___ BPC	___ Baths and Parks Committee
___ PC	___ Parks Committee
CPS	Commons Preservation Society
HO	Home Office
LCPPM	London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality
LCC	London County Council
___ POSC	___ Parks and Open Spaces Committee
MBW	Metropolitan Board of Works
___ PCOSC	___ Parks, Commons and Open Spaces Committee
MPGA	Metropolitan Public Gardens Association
NAPSS	National Association for the Promotion of Social Science
OW	Office of Works
PRO	Public Record Office
RBS	Royal Botanic Society
RVPC	Royal Victoria Park Committee
WO	War Office

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